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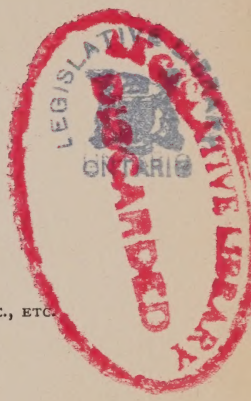
INTO THE EAST

NOTES
ON BURMA AND MALAYA



BY

RICHARD CURLE

AUTHOR OF
"WANDERINGS: A BOOK OF TRAVEL AND REMINISCENCE," ETC., ETC.

WITH A PREFACE BY

JOSEPH CONRAD

55401

"Travelling is victory."
Arab Proverb.

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Much of this book has appeared serially—often in a very different form—in *The Times*, *The English Review*, *The Rangoon Times*, and *The Blue Peter*. I have to thank the editors of these papers for their permission to republish material.

PREFACE

THERE is no fate so uncertain as the fate of books of travel. They are the most assailable of all men's literary productions. The man who writes a travel-book delivers himself more than any other into the hands of his enemies. The popularising scientific writer's position is much more secure. His very subject is, properly speaking, marvellous in itself, and for that reason the intelligent multitude swallows it eagerly, or at least receives it with open mouth, and forms its own amazing conclusions. A writer of fiction—well!—he romances all the time, and the truth he has in him being disguised in various garments, from gold mantles to rags, is almost beyond the reach of criticism. All really he has got to attend

to is grammar and punctuation. Metaphysics of course are simply intoxicating for those who like that way of killing our appointed time in this valley of tears. But as to those whose fancy leads them to investigate more or less profoundly that same valley . . . !

But after all a traveller is very much to be envied. He is to be envied for the instinct that prompts him, for the courage that sustains him. He is to be admired for enduring a spectacle almost intolerably gorgeous and varied, but with only hints, here and there, of dramatic scenes, with, practically, no star actors in it, with the knowledge that the curtain will not fall for months and months to come ; and that he must play the exacting part of a spectator of those human characteristics and activities, in their picturesque, ugly, or savage settings, without, so to speak, the prospect of going home to bed presently. Imagine a lover of drama and of stage effects forced to sleep in his very stall, and, every day, opening

his eyes upon a never-ceasing performance. The taste for that sort of thing may well be envied as evidence of capacity for mental and physical resistance, not only against the strain of all the "things that seem to be," but against one's own weakness. Perhaps that is the reason why the Arabs, racially great travellers and great lovers of wonders, invented the proverb, "Travelling is victory," which stands as the motto of this book. It expresses, indeed, a romantic conception. But there is a soberness of temperament in the Arab race which has prevented it from rushing exultingly into the writing of travel-books. Of course I am an ignorant person, from circumstances which it would not be to my advantage to disclose, but I can only call to mind one Arab traveller who has written a book; and surely if there had been shoals of them I would have heard of another.

Those people did much of their travelling sword in hand and with the name of the One God on their lips. But theirs were personally

conducted parties, as destructive to the peace and the spiritual character of places they visited as any crowd from a tourist agency invading the shades of Vallombrosa. Let us forget the Arabs as well as their successors who are achieving victory every year at the price of so many pounds per head for a certain number of days. They demand neither our admiration nor our pity.

Nowadays many people encompass the globe. That kind of victory became to a certain extent fashionable for some years after the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez. Multitudes rushed through that short cut with blank minds and, alas, also blank note-books where the megalomania from which we all more or less suffer, got recorded in the shape of "Impressions." The inanity of the mass of travel-books the Suez Canal is responsible for took the proportions of an enormous and melancholy joke. For it was a mournful sight to see so many people giving themselves away. Their

books covered private shelves and the tables of *cabinets de lecture* in a swarm more devastating to the world's freshness of impression than a swarm of locusts in a field of young corn. When that visitation began I was quite a boy and in my innocence I read them all, or, at least, all I could lay my hands on. Women, single or in pairs, fashionable couples, professors of intense gravity, facetious business men—I read all their travel-books, including even Baron Hübner's *Voyage Round the World*, which, I should think, remains unequalled to this day.

That category of travellers with their parrot-like remarks, their strange attempts at being funny, and their lamentable essays in seriousness has apparently passed away. Or perhaps they only print their books for circulation amongst friends. I suspect, however, they have ceased to write simply because there are too many of them. They do not appear as travellers even to the most naïve minds and perhaps even to their own

minds. They are simply an enormous company of people who go round the world for a change and rest, either suffering from overwork (whatever that may mean) or from neurasthenia. And I am sure my best wishes go with them for an easy and radical recovery. Steamship companies love them.

Sporting travellers form a class by themselves. They mostly write for other sportsmen, though I must confess that their books hold for me even now some fascination. They are apt to grow monotonous in the descriptive statistics of slaughter and as to the shortcomings of their "boys." Also in their admiration for their trackers, who seem all to have been made from the same pattern. I have noticed them adopting of late years a half-apologetic tone about their exploits; whereas the men of twenty-five years ago, with their much less perfect weapons and their big records, were frankly exulting. Frankness is a virtue I like. I would respect the modern attitude more

if I were sure of its absolute genuineness. Moderation in game killing is enforced now by many regulations; but on considering how easy it is not to shoot an antelope one becomes slightly doubtful of the perfect candour of men who travel thousands of miles in dreary steamboats and uncomfortable primitive trains for sport. On the other hand, I admit that a sportsman who would consistently miss every antelope would be an extremely uninteresting person. The world of explorers and discoverers, the heroes of my boyhood, has vanished almost to nothing in the nineteenth century. Some of them wrote the classics of travel, but no passage of years can dim my admiration for their selfless spirit and manly faithfulness to their task pursued in solitude or with a few devoted henchmen, persevered in through numberless days with death only a pace behind, but with a calm mind and a steady heart.

What about mere wanderers? — those

individuals that one meets in various fairly well-known localities, but who come upon one round unexpected corners, often shabby and depressed, sometimes haggard and jaunty; with tales in their mouths of the flattest description or of a comic quality bordering on tears; with, now and then, a story that would frighten you to death if you were one of those men who don't know how to smile in time. I would class them as an outcast tribe if it did not sound so rude. And I would not be rude for anything to people capable of starting on their travels with their hands, and very little else besides, in their pockets. I have known amongst them men of ruffianly mental complexion, cultivating a truculent manner and a cold steady stare, who, if it were possible to bluff one's own destiny, might have been sitting in high places. And I ask myself, in my half-reluctant partiality for the class, whether some of them have not achieved it. But success disguises them at

once and contemporary history gives them other names.

In my review of the categories of men who move about the earth I come now to the real travellers who wrote books, the protagonists of the modern travellers, in the same way, I may say, in which Hannon may be looked upon as a protagonist of the discoverers and the circumnavigators of the globe. Only the *Periplus* was probably a dreary official report. At any rate it has not come down to us. The outstanding figure amongst those men who dedicated their books of travel to popes and emperors is Marco Polo, with his meticulous descriptive gift, his cautious credulity, his eye for splendour and his historian's rather than a traveller's temperament. He gave his readers what the readers of that day wanted, historical facts in a foreign and gorgeous atmosphere. But the time for such books of travel is past on this earth girt about with cables, with an atmosphere made restless

by the waves of ether, lighted by that sun of the twentieth century under which there is nothing new left now, and but very little of what may still be called obscure.

The day of many-volumed "Journeys, through or to," of "Relations of this or that" (and much charm and ability some of them had), the days of heroic travel are gone; unless, of course, in the newspaper sense, in which heroism like everything else in the world becomes as common if not as nourishing as our daily bread. There would be always a lady or a gentleman ready to discover with considerable fuss a bit of territory of, say, ten square miles, resembling exactly the surrounding and already explored lands; or interview some new ruler, like a reflection in a dim and tarnished mirror of some real chieftain in the books of a hundred years ago; or marvel at a disagreeable fish of ferocious habits which had been described already in some old-time, simply-worded, unsensational "Relation."

But even this is a game which is losing its interest, and in a very little time will have come to an end. Presently there will be no backyard left in the heart of Central Africa that has not been peeped into by some person more or less commissioned for the purpose. The Nigeria of Barth, of Denham, of Clapperton, of Mungo Park, of other infinitely curious and profoundly inspired men, will be bristling with police posts, colleges, tramway poles, and all those improving things triumphantly recorded, and always with the romantic addition that, within twenty miles, the hills, or the forests, or the holes in the sand, or the depths of the jungle (that blessed word) are swarming with cannibal tribes miraculously restrained by one white man with two black soldiers and his native cook for all company. And the great cloud of fatuous daily photographs and even more fatuous descriptive chatter, under whose shadow no traveller could live, will brood over those seldom-visited places

of the world that, despoiled of their old black soul of mystery, have not yet acquired its substitute, which will be marvellously piebald when it comes.

This moment of ill-humour with " things as they are becoming " is of course perfectly unreasonable and even perverse, which is worse. It would not deserve to be tolerated except for its inherent piety. As a matter of fact I have been thinking for a moment of the dead, of the great and good travellers loved in my boyhood, as I laid aside the MS. of this modern traveller who by publishing it has delivered himself to his enemies. He is very modern, for he is fashioned by the conditions of an explored earth in which the latitudes and longitudes having been recorded once for all have become things of no importance, in the sense that they can no longer appeal to the spirit of adventure, inflame no imagination, lead no one up to the very gates of mortal danger.

These basic facts of geography having been ascertained by the observations of heavenly bodies, the glance of the modern traveller contemplating the much-surveyed earth beholds in fact a world in a state of transition; very different in this from the writers of travel-books of Marco Polo's time, who in their conscientious narratives seem to progress amongst immutable wonders, to feed their curiosity on a consistency of the splendid and the bizarre, presented to their eyes to stare at, to their minds to moralise upon.

And those things, which stand as if imperishable in the pages of old books of travel, are all blown away, have vanished as utterly as the smoke of the travellers' camp fires in the icy night air of the Gobi Desert, as the smell of incense burned in the temples of strange gods, as the voices of Asiatic statesmen speculating with the cruel wisdom of past ages on matters of peace and war.

Nothing obviously strange remains for

our eyes now. The Khan of Tartary's court ceremonies were certainly marvellous in quite a different sense from the procedure followed at Kuala Kangsar two years ago, when the Sultan of Perak was invested with the K.C.M.G. by the Governor of the Straits Settlements. This modern traveller describes it all in less words than Marco Polo would have used paragraphs on such a striking occasion. It was curious for him to watch under the formal routine of official compliments the Malay princes play up to British etiquette, while grafting it on their own ideas of politeness, and wearing, he thought, a slightly ironical smile on their dark faces. And to think that only fifty years ago, after a certain amount of jungle and stockade fighting, the Sultan of Perak, or perhaps his brother ruler next door in Selangor, having listened attentively to a lecture from a British Admiral on the heinousness of a certain notable case of piracy, turned round quickly to his attending

chiefs and to the silent throng of his Malay subjects, exclaiming, "Hear now, my people! Don't let us have any more of this little game." Those words ought to have been engraved in letters of gold on a marble monument at the mouth of the Jugra river; for from the moment they were pronounced dates the era of security for the poor folks of the coast, for the fishermen and traders in the Straits of Malacca. The downfall of local piracy in fact. The world in transition!

Our very curiosities have changed, growing more subtle amongst the vanishing mysteries of the earth. Very appropriately this modern traveller reclining on the verandah of the State Rest-house, after having watched the ceremonies of installation in the blaring of trumpets and the gorgeous bright colours of the throng, recalls the strong impression of, one might say, indifferent and rather contemptuous goodwill between brown and white, and gives himself up to the vain (as he himself observes)

occupation of speculating on the future of countries. But he does it not in the spirit of a statesman looking for political truth, but in the doubting mood of a traveller of our day who on the very threshold of the East has questioned himself as to the ultimate truth of travel ; whether perchance it was no more than the mastery of first impressions ; and whether the sanity of our outlook on the world consists in secret revolt against its facts but in the final acceptance of the whole, or in the conformity with all the multiple forms and the mental rejection of life's inscrutable purpose ? It is this mood which makes him so responsive to the inner promptings suggested by travel, which informs the felicitous rendering of his visual impressions. This it is that forces him, while looking out into the night from the deck of an Irrawaddy flotilla steamer, to admit to himself man's secret antagonism to the wilderness ; or during his few hours' stay in Bhamo, a town on the very frontier

of the Chinese enigma, where caravans incessantly come and go through mysterious valleys and where people live on rumours from day to day, to absorb its spirit of secrecy and waiting and hear suddenly around him "the whisper of innumerable hills passing on one to another the restless murmur of men's hearts." Very modern in impressions, in appreciations, in curiosities, and in his very love of the mother earth, of whose children he has written subtly and tenderly in some three volumes of characteristic tales; a traveller of our day, condemned to make his discoveries on beaten tracks, he looks on, sensitive, meditative, with delicate perceptions and a gift for expression, alive to the saving grace of human and historical associations; and while pursuing amongst the men busy with ascertained facts the riddles presented by a world in transition, he seems to have captured for us the spirit of modern travel itself.

JOSEPH CONRAD.

August 1, 1922.

INTRODUCTION

This little book is the result of a ten months' stay in the East, five of them in Burma, four of them in the Federated Malay States, from the end of July 1920 till the end of April 1921. It was mostly done on the spot and is not in the least exhaustive. I just wrote it because I wanted to write it. Readers of my *Wanderings*, which deals mainly with travels in Europe, Africa, South America, and the West Indies, may remember that I stated in the introduction to that work that I hoped to publish in time other books about other parts of the world. This is the first of these, and without being presumptuous, I trust it will not be the last. They console me for the vanished days.

Yes, they console me. Like other people I would wish to keep what has gone, wish to re-create for ever the hours of yesterday. My revisiting ghost troubles the scenes of my former

life, and if everything appears slightly unwinking and mournful, hushed in the radiant, slumbrous afternoon of the tropics, as all conjured visions must in the intensity of your remembrance, yet there is an anodyne of sadness in romance. It is the call of distance with its promise of a great reward, with its sorrow that things fade. That kind of sadness is a healing film, and as I recollect and recollect I know that I am slowly filling up the interstices with the stuff of oblivion.

As most books are written with the idea of being criticized, I think, generally speaking, that it is childish to object to criticisms that you don't like, but there was one criticism frequently levelled against *Wanderings* which I fear, from its nature, may also be levelled against this book, and which I do think I may refer to without impropriety. I saw it constantly stated that any enjoyment to be obtained from my writing was vitiated by the feeling that the author, himself, was always bored wherever he went. Now, apart from the fact that I was quite unconscious of it and that for every disappointed remark I could show a dozen appreciative ones, the truth is that such disenchantment as I have felt has arisen not from a blasé spirit but from a too eager

one. If countries and towns have not invariably come up to expectation it was because my expectation soared, not because my expectation was weak. To the reader, looking for results, that may be a small point, to me it is a very big one. It makes, in fact, all the difference in the world.

As for me, I cannot imagine a time when it would not be good to wander or when I should lose the zest of the earth. Romance always mounts high beyond the horizon and the whispered hope is indestructible. You are for ever, as it were, going to where there is escape, to where things happen. And that thought, I am convinced, is what must animate every traveller to whom the universe is part fact and part the creation of his own fancy. Above all the discouragements of experience one does come to believe that there is surely something that will not pass away, something that is not a mere figment. It is like the taste of the absolute.

R. C.

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THE ENTRY

My companion and I had hardly emerged from the Customs House at Port Said when we ran straight into a B.I. captain up from Delagoa Bay with a cargo of Natal coal. "Hulloa!" cried my companion (he was a Rangoon river pilot), "who'd have thought of meeting you; come and tell us all about it," and the three of us were soon drinking iced Dutch beer on the verandah of the Oriental in full sight of the beach and the green rollers of the Mediterranean. The captain had the weary air of a man just off the seclusion of a twenty-three days' voyage, and he spoke with considerable bitterness about the East in general. The pilot was sympathetic. "Talk of the call of the East," said he, "I never heard it; the people who hear it haven't been there. I want to get back to Scotland." But I held my peace. Was I not about to slip through the gateway for

myself? We had some more beer on that, and a rosier view of things seemed to envelop my friends, who began to swap yarns. I listened to them half-awake; I heard, as it were, the whisper of the East from far away, and above their remarks it floated before me like a perfume. A juggler appeared suddenly, with that kind of cringing swagger of the Port Said jugglers, and began to produce bedraggled chickens out of aluminium cups and folds in his clothes. I remembered it all from long ago, but the town itself I did not remember. It used not to have this air of cleanliness and respectability—no, indeed! After a time we got up to return to our ship. She was lying right down the entrance to the Canal, and the row was long on that hot afternoon. As we bade good-bye to the captain, he said to me in his mournful, friendly voice, "I'll be following you along to Colombo on Sunday. Seventeen days she'll take over it, the old tub, and a stern wind in the Red Sea. Well, you'll know all about it." I smiled at him; it was fitting that one should attain paradise only through purgatory.

This, I need scarcely explain, was my first journey to the East. For many years the thought

of it had dazzled my imagination, but now, on the threshold, I was conscious that romance, as one grows older, has to be listened for, has to be caught, and does not fill one's life as it did at twenty. My very longing for the East had something in it of a self-conscious quality, the mere creation of a mood and of recollected names. Is it, I wonder, nature's compensation against that time when we can travel no more and must find in one particular corner the epitome of our roving desires? Behind us the colliers made a serried wall nosing the shore, and across the water Port Said, shining in its colours, held all the glitter of Egypt without its dust. And presently we took aboard our pilot and started down the Canal, while the sellers of necklaces and cigarettes bobbed behind us in their row-boats, reluctantly silent, straining their eyes for new victims. Our wash lapped softly on the shores and the pleasant shaded paths vanished as the desert opened ahead, with Kantara, that yellow town born of the war, piled high with Government stores and the wreckage of armies, on our left, and the streak of the Palestine railway winding through the dunes beyond. Soldiers were bathing in the Canal, and cries of greeting and farewell

passed from shore to ship. And soon the sunset flared and sank, the searchlight on our bows was switched on, and we tiptoed on our way and out into the Salt Lakes with the pierced darkness on either hand.

We must have touched Suez in the dead of night, for when I awoke next morning we were in the Red Sea. Its ashen, rocky shores stretched before us, widening as we went, and the torrid air above seemed like the very breath of their fiery waste. Great streaks of reddish sand or of some strange algæ floated like spume upon the surface, and the meaning of that water's name was revealed to me in a glance. The ship wore a look of exhaustion, as though fleeing in her last extremity from a surrounding pestilence. The hush of the fierce day brooded upon the sea, and the beat of our screws, the call of voices from above, the echo of moving feet, sounded muffled and lifeless. The vitality of existence was clogged by oppression and the days held us to them in a dry and burning embrace, as when in dreams we attempt to escape from an enemy and discover that we cannot move. I am not surprised at the stories of madness and sudden death, of men rushing up from the stokehold and flinging

themselves overboard, that are the cheerful subject of conversation in the Red Sea, and I am not surprised, partly because I have felt for myself the strain of the place ("Oh, but it's nothing to the Persian Gulf," observed an optimist to me, sitting before an immense iced drink), and partly because I have been a witness to such a tragedy.

It was a Sunday afternoon and we were then about half-way down towards the entrance to the Indian Ocean. Tea was over, and in the faint freshness of the evening people were sitting about the decks, talking languidly and spasmodically, when all at once the siren blew four times and was still. The sound floated away, dying instantaneously upon the airless sea, and the ship shivered from stem to stern as she was brought round by a reversed propeller. But it was no Lascar, who, finding himself in the water, would immediately come to his senses and, calling loudly on the name of Allah, make for the thrown lifebuoy, that had gone ; no, it was a passenger, an Indian married to a white girl—a more complex matter altogether. He had not even jumped, he had climbed the railing aft and let himself fall deliberately. In one instant every person

seemed to be on deck or aloft, and every eye was glued to the sea. It is difficult to describe, save in terms of an enchanter's wand, the changed atmosphere of the scene : the spell was shattered and the warning blasts had been like the urgent call of life or death to the drugged dwellers of an opium-den. The foaming wake of our circles drew curious figures on the oily solitude of the swell, but no head showed up there and the drifting buoys resembled sea-birds resting untroubled on the quiet water. A big P. & O., coming up behind us making for Bombay, appeared to be shifting to each corner of the horizon as she, too, turned in her tracks, dancing, as it were, a sombre minuet with the Bibby liner. But the Indian was seen no more ; his insanity or despair was carried with him into the depths.

As you near Perim the queerest little rocky islets emerge out of the haze in the very wake of ocean-going steamers. These death-traps for the unwary are guarded by lighthouses, maintained by the Egyptian Government, and manned by Greeks, who are, really, the only people on the face of the earth who will live literally anywhere if you pay them. They have gulls for their companions and the hiss of a dead sea for

their lullaby. God help them! But, indeed, the Greeks have an extraordinary capacity—I'm not sure it's not even an heroic capacity—for following in the footsteps of adventure and for vulgarising the whole globe with their petty cafés and insignificant trades. Tireless in the accumulation of money, they live on next to nothing and preserve an almost theatrical affection for their country in a hide-bound indifference to their present circumstances. It's a strange kind of stoicism.

It was night when we rounded Sokotra and drove out into the full force of the monsoon. The rolling was bad enough at the start but it weakened before long, and the passengers, free from the gasping heat, began to consolidate their cliques with the intensity of a cathedral town. Often on long voyages, watching the vivid concentration of the lives on board and the passions of a world in miniature, I have suddenly thought of all the other ships wandering at that very moment over the seas, and of how, in each one of them, a similar drama was being played, oblivious to the remainder of mankind. Invincible and inane, life re-creates for every generation the lost illusions of the last, and

where can one study that truth more plainly than in a ship? The enforced idleness and contact bring out points a more normal existence would try to stifle, and I am rather coming to the opinion that boredom is as disintegrating in its effects as hunger.

The wind blew from off the coast of Africa, covering the sea with slaty waves and white horses, and each day brought us nearer to the East. The pilot and I paced the deck without enthusiasm. "Look," he would say, stopping to shake a contemptuous hand towards the horizon, "if that isn't the ugliest damned sight!" and we would make moodily for the smoking saloon. Inside there jolly voices could be heard calling loudly for the bar-steward and public-spirited individuals were adding up the amount of the day's sweep-money. I am not one of those who win sweepstakes, but then I am not one of those who get killed in railway accidents, so that the general level of nonentity is quite to my liking. Moreover, anything to break the ennui, short of forming one of the twelve lap-dogs of a pretty woman! That was asking too much. Besides, women who encourage that sort of thing aren't worth it. No, one queue a day, for my bath,

was sufficient. Oh, but that monotony of the hours at sea, in which the agonising slowness of the present mocks one's memory of time's swiftness in retrospection! But then all life is only a series of dragging hours that await some magic East.

Colombo is 3400 miles from Port Said, and a high-powered steamer can do the distance well within the fortnight. On the evening of the tenth day we espied the light on the atoll-reef of Minnicoy, and on the morrow there crept over the horizon the far sails of a fishing fleet—the Colombo catamarans heading seaward in a zigzag line. In the pearly bloom of that still morning those sails were in a double sense the harbingers of another world. No longer the sea but the land, no longer Europe but Asia. While the night was yet dark the boats had put out from their island to greet the dawn upon the Indian Ocean, and now they seemed to sleep after pious labours, faithful worshippers of the sun and of the water. And then gradually, like a wraith, Ceylon upreared from the deep ; the East was taking shape before my eyes. The shores of palm stretched out along the surge, massive and grim, and the laden smell of Asia floated to us over the waves. It was the very moment I had been awaiting.

I was standing thus before the promise of the East, when just at my back a voice announced sententiously, "Yes, there's the little old island!" You know how the mere intonation of a voice, quite apart from what is said, can be an index to the mind; well, this voice and this remark were at one. It was a self-satisfied, irritating voice, as if the owner of it imagined that nobody else were capable of so abstruse a calculation. I spun round and saw before me a small straight man with a severe expression, a low forehead, and an uxorious eye. He appeared to be conjuring up the island by the sheer power of his will; he had certainly conjured away the fine filament of my haunting idea. I turned and mingled with the passengers. The hearty talk of light farewells was on every lip, and the subtle corrective of the land had already cooled the exotic friendships of a long voyage. We had swung parallel with the island, and the shadowy East was growing clearer every instant. In that physical emergence the spirit of the solid earth seemed to swell about us, and with its silent insistent note to break the reverie of our sea-dreams. The vast ocean was forgotten, the ocean in which man looks forth upon an untrammelled world, and,

all-ready for the shore, we altered visibly with the altering scene. And now we had caught up with the Drunken Sailor buoy, tumbling for ever outside Colombo harbour, and now had circled the breakwater, and now had come to rest. Colombo, a bright variegated bird, lay gleaming along the beach with her emerald wings outspread.

COLOMBO

LONG ago, travellers to Africa or South America always thought it decorous to begin with a chapter on Teneriffe, and, in a similar way, those who visit the East now think it decorous to begin with a description of Ceylon. And I daresay it is, though I expect the world is tired of hearing about that island by now. Yet, as each new person perceives something in places nobody else has ever perceived, though frequently not of the least value, there is that much to justify another picture. Mine will not be long; it will be the same old prelude.

Of all the Eastern towns I have visited, Colombo most surely impressed upon me the atmosphere of the tropics. Nature towers about it with that sort of startling exaggeration you may at times see in very full-blooded people. Colour riots in flowering trees upon the side-

walks and flowering shrubs that creep over the roofs. And to that opulence of nature is added a feeling, probably erroneous, that the inhabitants, themselves, are opulent. The town is crammed with jewellers' shops, stocked expensively with precious stones from the Ceylon mines and worked tortoiseshell from the Maldive Islands. And as if you might miss them in your innocence, an army of touts, speaking broken English with a false air of rectitude, is ever at your elbow, urging you into such and such a store. Nobody wants you to buy, they only want to show; it is such a pleasure to meet a connoisseur. There is a kind of hypnotising ritual connected with your ensnarement. You are made to sit down in a darkened, airless room; various drawers of a cabinet are opened; various little parcels in tissue paper are unwrapped; finally, the jeweller picks up one stone after another with his delicate pincers, flashing them before you with a beatific smile. They are sleek and discreet men, these jewellers, Indians of some sort, Parsees perhaps, and their ingratiating enthusiasm is suggestive of a patent medicine puff. You alone, as it were, are taken into their confidence; before you it is useless to wear the cloak. And now, candidly,

as between experts, have you ever seen a sapphire like that? And, of course, if you haven't the ready money, why, a cheque. . . . One feels so ashamed of hurting their feelings, but they must be hardened to it by this time. They exist on the passing population of ships, out of which if they catch one person in fifty they are probably doing well.

I remember that when I first landed in Colombo after my run across the Indian Ocean, my chief desire was to get a meal that hadn't been cooked aboard ship. It wasn't an exalted wish, but it was sufficiently urgent to drive me at once to the G.O.H., which lies providentially beside the quay and is, I should suppose, actually the best-known hotel in the whole of the East. In its high dining-room, with the electric fans spinning from the ceiling like dragon-flies, with the curried prawns upon the table, and with the Cinghalese waiters moving to and fro in their white suits, one felt thoroughly launched upon the Orient. These little dark men, with their drooping moustaches and sad expressions and with the half-circlets of tortoiseshell standing up round their heads, bear a ludicrous resemblance to inoffensive, horned devils. They moon about as though

lost in vacuity, and in their smallness and mild ways they are the human counterpart of the small mild cattle of the country. After the sight of the dhows in the harbour, manned by sturdy Arabs who wander down here from the Persian Gulf, and after the sight of the wily Indian jewellers of Colombo, there is something pathetic about these forlorn-looking little men, who appear neither sturdy nor wily but only slightly depressed.

There is next to nothing to do in Colombo unless you belong to the place (of course, that depends to some extent on your frame of mind), and as satisfactory a method of passing the time as any is to drive out to Mount Lavinia, seven miles away, through the wide and wooded suburbs that remain with you for practically the whole of the distance. There is a spaciousness about these suburbs that, in the splendour of tree-growth half concealing the residential houses, suggests in full the fascination of tropical cities. When you are in Colombo you do feel that you are in the hub of Eastern things ; you don't have that backwater sensation of so many Eastern towns. It is, I fancy, one of the secrets of Colombo's popularity. The hotel at Mount Lavinia stands

above the sea, resolutely tropical in its situation between the green tide and the brown coconut grove, and visitors hurry out there to obtain the southern fulfilment of their dreams. And they ought not to be disappointed.

But having mentioned two hotels already, I had better mention a third. I refer to the Galle Face, which lies along the coast a good mile from the centre of the town and is approached by a glorified road that skirts the sea with ample sweep, giving by day a sight of the catamarans dipping up and down on the fishing-beds, and by night a glimpse of breaking waves in the rising wind of the monsoon. It really is a fine road, and as you pass in darkness out of the town towards the Galle Face, the revolving rays of the Queen Street lighthouse keep following you on their seaward course as though you were being pursued by the fighting-machine's eye of one of Mr. Wells's Martians. As for the hotel itself, that also is fine—a big handsome building where everybody seems always to be either just arriving or just leaving. When a mail-boat comes in the management usually arrange a dance, and wandering couples, fresh from England, may feel the first glamour of tropic nights in a setting

of considerable luxury. It's very charming, only the average of conversation will keep turning from the romantic to the mundane, and tender remarks are too often interspersed by bitter doubts on the subject of bargains.

The cawing of crows wakes you up early at the Galle Face. Those birds regard the guests' bedrooms as their own, and I have returned from my bath to find five at work on the remainder of my chota-hazri. They can flutter out of a room with the most incredibly thief-like realism, whisking round the corner of the window-sill with guilt written all over their backs. They are not the sort of birds you catch napping, though we did carry one out to sea with us. It simply couldn't make up its mind what to do. I never saw an expression of more foolish indecision than that bird's face wore when it realised we were heading for the open. The other crows had all flown off, but this one fluttered about up above, peering alternately landwards and down on the deck and uttering indignant and bewildered caws. There it remained in a kind of horrified stupor for the four and a half days till we entered the Rangoon river—the distant Andamans can have given it but a momentary hope—when

it struck out gaily for the shore. No doubt it met with speedy and certain death at the hands of the outraged local breed: crows, like the rest of us, have to pay for sins of omission.

I must say I have an affection for the Colombo crows, and whenever they have disturbed me I was quite prepared to lean out and watch the busy blazing morn of the East. It's the hour above all. There is a kind of Native Quarter at the back of the hotel, and already shopping would be in full swing. All sorts of diverse and inscrutable types were afoot, filling the street, the brown roofs of whose shanties appeared intermittently amidst the luxuriance of the great trees and the flaring creepers. And amongst that crowd of native purchasers hovering round the dark huddled shops, shops like holes whence issued whiffs to contaminate the morning air, an occasional spruce burgher would be seen threading his way townwards. To an extraordinary degree the whole sight conjured up the mingled squalor and vitality of the East.

Colombo is encompassed by plains, and the road to Kandy passes at first through a country that it is hopeless to describe. It is a mixture of forest and swamp and paddy-field, all heaped

inextricably together without a clear outline or any guiding plan. An unlovely curious tract, and not even solitary in the perpetual succession of Tamil villages. In July, when I motored over it, the bare fields were mostly under water, and half-naked men were turning over the wet clods, while buffaloes wallowed in the mire. It gave me a sense of desolation that nothing in Europe can compare with. The paddy-fields, tiny beside those of Burma, are built in terraces to conserve the water, and the infinite labour of a poor population is visible in the manner every square yard seems to have been used. After a time you reach the foot-hills and begin to scale up through tea-gardens and rubber plantations, with winding views of real magnificence over the spread ranges and upland forests.

We never got to Kandy, though that was our intention. We did nothing but have breakdowns, one after the other, which required all the skill of the driver to mend and all his assurance to explain away. However, we did get as far as the Peradeniya Gardens, but four miles short out of seventy-five, and in retrospect that appears like an accomplishment of faith. These Gardens are the official centre of botany in Ceylon, and

have a setting of spacious dignity. Amidst their avenues, and down along the banks of the river that flows so softly through their grounds, we loitered like people altogether released from time. The turmoil of the earth was forgotten, its unhappiness and its hopes, and the short twilight of the tropics found us still there when we ought long ago to have started back. Indeed, deep night had fallen before we reached the flats, and as our car kept to its reputation, only in a rather accentuated manner, we were constantly stopping to tinker it up in a regular halo of naphtha flares. An endless slow string of bullock-carts, that island traffic which goes mostly at night, crept and lumbered past us as we gazed down disconsolately at the miserable machine. But we reached the Galle Face at last—again, as it were, by an effort of faith—and never were hotel lights more welcome. There was something, in its own way, most satisfying in that homely solidity after the airy remoteness of the lofty garden.

Like most people who go to the East I know Colombo only by a series of aimless days. And that is only knowing it in a pictorial sense. Those vague parties that are made up on board ship for

the shore always end in cane chairs with drinks at your elbow. One becomes immediately very tired for no reason at all. The whole town seems to be full of your fellow-passengers drifting to and fro, greeting one another with slightly embarrassed smiles. There is never enough time to ignite your energy, never enough time to escape from out your petty atmosphere. You will leave the city with its secrets, you will leave the island sleeping there behind its hills, as undiscovered as you found them. Your final remembrance of Colombo will be one of cold drinks and somnolent conversation. It's as if you had been sitting all along in an easy-chair looking at a brilliant and incalculable painting.

RANGOON JOTTINGS—I

Cities (like persons) have their idiosyncrasies that, slowly revealing themselves layer upon layer, absorb you at last into their atmosphere. It sounds paradoxical to say that the more you know about a place the less you see in it, but it only means that custom and curiosity seldom exist side by side. The visitor, feeling the contrasts, divines the individuality, while the inhabitant takes all for granted ; knowledge can be very dense. You may know everything about a town, from its dark secrets to its best society, from its borough statistics to the history of its past, but you may miss the greatest thing of all through belonging to the greatest thing of all, just as the whole earth is unconscious of its motion because it all moves together. And the greatest thing about a town is its personality. My contention is that those very people who make

a town are themselves made by it ; which is not, I trust, the same as saying that those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword.

Naturally, I hold this belief in a rather intangible sense. I only argue that there is a subtle and, so to express it, nacreous process at work, which, giving you the spirit of another continuity, covers up with forgetfulness the very memory of the exchange. But the visitor who criticizes is, himself, identified with some portion of the earth, and thus all judgements on persons or places are biassed by our preconceptions and our past.

Assuming, then, my argument to be correct, what is it a new-comer feels about Rangoon that to an inhabitant is second nature ? What is the one spirit emerging alike from the crowded streets and the lakeland walks ? In brief, what is that first impression which to him, at the moment, is so surely the ultimate truth ? Well, each must speak for himself, for it is only the interaction of personalities that gives any weight to applied æsthetic criticism, but, as for me, my first impression—an impression that remained till the end, I may add—was of a rather exhausted contradiction. It filled the whole air and rested

like a load on my heart. It is as though the old East could not conquer the newness of the town, the tropics could not put their full grip upon it, the energy of its citizens could not overcome the lassitude of the delta air. Rangoon is neither Burma nor the East. It seems to hover between the two like the apparition of a polyglot ghost. Its acrid air tires you, and its utilitarianism is alien to the drowsiness of the Orient. I have never known a town so vivid, at once, of modernity and age, or above whose activity, the activity of 350,000 people, there hovered so queerly the breath of stagnation.

In all the prosperity of Rangoon there lurks a sense of fatigue, as though its European dwellers had to fight against boredom by subsisting on their nervous energy. The life of Rangoon goes on from day to day in the longing for release from exile, and, living thus eagerly in the present, buoyed up by a distant hope, it tends to ignore everything but its immediate surroundings. The doings of Europe are of little interest to Rangoon simply because they are of so much interest, and a man who goes home for good is soon forgotten simply because you dare not ponder too much on his new happiness. But I

do not think that this unrest is confined only to the British. The very Indians consider Rangoon as a mere stage in their wanderings from India, and, as for the Burmese, the town is to them a place of pilgrimage rather than a part of true Burma.

All this sounds, I'm afraid, a captious summary of first (and last) impressions, but emotional satisfaction becomes more evasive as one grows older, and the infirmity of criticism is its tendency to be sterile. We have about as much chance of finding the true values as a crab has of overtaking a battle-cruiser, but it is cheering to think that there may be such things, as it gives to our most foolish speculations a touch of reality. A town like Rangoon actually has a personality if one could but put one's finger on it. Thus one can initiate wild statements and defy contradiction—for who knows where truth is hidden? —but in doing so one may rather resemble a blackmailer who makes scandalous allegations and then observes that a negative proves nothing. But I do, at least, have sufficient grace to acknowledge that in my judgements it may be myself and not Rangoon that is most to blame.

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Only two kinds of people should write about the East—those who know a great deal and those who know next to nothing. And the reason for this is plain. The ones who know a great deal have acquired knowledge through the imaginative insight of long experience, and the ones who know next to nothing can still face, with their enthusiasm undismayed, the inchoateness of the East. For if knowledge comes slowly, freshness fades quickly, and to most Europeans the East is not only an enigma but a weariness. I am speaking of the nations of the East, of her cities, and of that tonality of the whole which stirs upon the tropic Orient. The peoples of the East are diverse as the peoples of the West, but whereas Western scepticism is a negation and so not unifying though equalising, the theological integrity of the East gives a kind of sameness to the Eastern attitude above all its varied beliefs. One does not know how far religion is modified by race and climate—in other words, how nearly people achieve at last the religion most suitable to their needs—but if one could accept that plausible doctrine it would be a strong argument against the logical fallacies of Europe.

I am induced to make these remarks by the

feeling one gets in the East that morality, as a word of any meaning, must be incorporated in dogma, and that life, therefore, is astonishingly more compartmented than in Europe. The lives of Easterns are inward ceremonials, and conventionalism is not so much a sign of respectability as a part of the soul's existence. Exploring the streets of a city like Rangoon, I was conscious that individual lives are both more serious and less sacred than in the Occident—more serious because the other world is so near, less sacred because the other world is so desirable. Is that, perhaps, a fundamental difference between East and West ?

The muddled physical appearance of any crowd is usually dominated by a central impression of its character, and Rangoon, seen, in this respect, as a typical city of the East, appears to be dominated by the stoical fatalism of creeds which regard death more as a stage than as a finish. That was what I found, though I admit that my exploration was rather perfunctory, and that I ought not to speak as if I really knew it. I don't know it. My four months of residence passed, I regret, in semi-glimpses and idle plans. Walking much in the heat is out of the question, and when

it is cool the city prepares for sleep. And then there is the rain, a rain which in the wet season pours down with an unceasing rattle that grows into a nervous obsession and seems to fill your mind with the mildew that rots your clothes. Altogether, it is not an easy town to know intimately. Rangoon people see, for the most part, little of it beyond the streets of their daily routine. Its Eastern life buzzes about them in the obscure isolation of unregarded localities. This riverine city of meeting races, whose central portion is laid out with frigid and banal regularity, holds, in truth, the suppressed energy and passion of a thousand unsuspected activities. The wandering men of the East come and go, the underground existence beats on unseen, the river and the interior disgorge and swallow up the incoherence and secretiveness of Asia.

It sounds incongruous to write about the streets of a city, as I proposed to myself to do, by saying nothing of them, but I wish to avoid those topographical details which yield with painful accuracy a totally false impression, giving to guide-books their peculiarly mummified usefulness. I might certainly describe the charm of the Sule Pagoda, the creeks choked with teak-

logs, the crowded shipping, the dingy markets, the yellow-red brick of the Secretariat and the Chief Court, but to what end? Photographs are more accurate.

Those streets, as streets, rather depressed me in their flat tameness. A peculiar bitter odour hovers about them, and their pavements are covered with gouts of blood-like crimson scattered there by the chewers of betel-nut. Amongst the crowds there always seem to be a large number of people intent, apparently, on nothing, and one does come to form the idea, not perhaps that time is of no account to Easterns, but that it exists for them in another way altogether. I remember emerging from the streets one day feeling rather depressed and asking a young friend of mine whether Calcutta could show me something better, and of the eagerness with which he responded, "Yes, rather, the races"—an observation which I greeted coldly. It wasn't Europe I was looking for.

No, it's not the streets I would describe, it's the vitality of the streets. It is curious that you soon find yourself more interested in the various castes and races of Indians than in a comparison between Chinese, Burmans, Shans,

Karens, Indians, Eurasians, etc. In the vast profusion of Indian types one seems to hold the key of India's extravagance and mystery.

They wear a sombre look, as though they were the children of a land haunted by devils and dark dreams, and they walk with stealthy litheness. Unlike the Burmese, the Indians have little regard for colour; they come not from the bright sunlight of green fields, but from brown plains or teeming cities. They appear literally to live in the streets; by day you see them surrounding, on their haunches, messes of curry, by night lying, in blanched fantastic attitudes, under porches and on the side-walks.

Against this air of constitutional gloom the Burman gaiety is not to be denied. But the two races do not love one another and mix as little as may be. Burmans are dramatic, but this, being compounded of the bias of their race, is fortunately quite unself-conscious. They are obscure with the national inner reticence of people who talk openly about everything, whereas Indians are obscure because they talk openly about nothing. Burmans, indeed, love the glitter of life and can even find it in cinematographs, of which, I was informed by one of those people

who revel in perfectly useless pieces of information, there are no less than twenty-six in Rangoon. I never saw such ecstatic advertisements as their native managers indulge in, and I really must give this one gem :

A Bride-Buying Brute, a Beautiful Sleep-Walking Bride, the "Other Woman," a True-to-Death Lover, a Faithful Maid with Tiger-like Love for her Darling Mistress, a Cheque-raising Step-Mother, are woven into a Most Bewitching Romance of Sensational Happenings of Mysterious Murder of the Multi-Millionaire —Mr. Wodruffe Clay.

But it is not only for that sort of advertisement one reads the Rangoon papers. I picked the following out one day, with its surprising air of Oriental magic in modern surroundings :

His Holiness Paramahamsa Satchidhananda Yogeeswara of Cuddappah will perform jhelastambam (floating on the water) with Padmasanam at 3.30 P.M. on Sunday, 26th September, in the tank close to Kamayut Railway Station.

Now, if there is a hopelessly sordid and prosaic place in the world it is Kamayut, a sort of suburb on the way from Rangoon to Insein, which is nine miles distant and where the railway

workshops are. However, that is where this strange affair took place evidently.

And here is another cutting which appealed to me :

NOTICE.—Sealed tenders for the purchase of eight female elephants will be received by the Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport, Maymyo, up to mid-day 20th August 1920. The elephants may be seen and examined at Bhamo on any specified date up to 10th August 1920, on 24 hours' notice being given to the Station Staff Officer, Bhamo.

I had been in neither Maymyo nor Bhamo then, and I read that notice with something of the ravishment one reads of high adventure in inaccessible parts. If elephants were for sale, these elephants must have been caught, and caught in Burma. And there it lay, the great country behind Rangoon, silent, brooding, awaiting the word.

Well, I am wandering from the streets, but then it was always easier to wander from them than to wander in them. That is true enough, whether on foot, spurning the rain and the heat, or in one of their gharris whose design is totally divorced from any theory of comfort.

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The borders of any city are, in a sense, the index of its heart. For the personality of the streets overflows into the quiet backways of the outskirts, and in the gardens of the rich there is indeed some echo of the slums. A town is both single and diverse, and though its series be infinite the sum of that series is one. The anchored central personality of all towns heightens in the nearness of streets the appeal of sylvan glimpses, and that, probably, is because contrast is the most important thing in the romance which is not based on the romanticism of the nineteenth century. This is our romance of contrast, a sort of half-return to the Renaissance theory of humanism. Mankind being at once the most exciting and mysterious thing in the world, the proximity of people adds vitality to the beauty of nature. In the crowded city there is exhaustion, in the deep country there is death, but in the suburbs, those spots despised by the artistic, there is exhilaration.

Having now stated this belief (which, strangely enough, is open to my own widest exceptions), let me gather up here some impressions of the outskirts of Rangoon. If one could view this city from above one would behold it tailing off

into a network of crossing roads, ribbons that wind between green foliage and island-studded lakes. To follow methodically these roads is no more my intention in print than it ever was in fact. If any delight can be reflected in my words it must be something of that delight one feels in the promise of the unexplored. Just as tourists who see everything are the only people who see nothing, so would such branching roads lose all significance by being familiar as a map. Familiarity, it is true, is romantic when combined with the unanalysable emotion of love of home, but that is only another stage of the same thing. Here in Rangoon I had to keep my idea intact by a willing ignorance that fed the imagination. The vistas I saw within the glades, the lanes that twisted from me into the forest, the untrodden paths, the unvisited houses—these were what threw their glamour upon the known. Those flat and wooded suburbs, softly green above the drought of summer, large with the ample gesture of the tropics, swarming with hidden life, formed within my mind not alone the picture of the scene, but the very spirit of it.

Rangoon people are proud of their lakes, but, if anything, they are a little too ornamental for

my taste. Even the greater volume of the Victoria Lakes has an artificial ruggedness that suggests a guiding intention. You may recall the garden-seats of twenty-five years ago that were supposed to look extremely rural by being covered with bark. The Victoria Lakes affected me with a similar twinge of unreality. I liked them, but I would have liked them better had there been sign-posts at every corner telling you that their origin was utilitarian: the slight sense of sham upon them might then have vanished. But at sunset, with a pink glow playing about the islands and the shadows smoking on the water, there is a feeling of exquisite rest in the dense security of the bordering woods. That is the hour for a visit.

The Royal Lakes, on the other hand, those lakes near the town, should be visited in the morning, when their frank prettiness is pensive as the face of a sleeping girl and as yet unsullied by the fierce breath of noon. The contrast between blue water (sky-reflected though it be), green trees, and golden dome of Shwe Dagon rising beyond, is most beautiful; indeed, it is only then that the passionate colours of the local picture-postcards resemble the truth. And more especially is this so when a file of bright-clad,

laughing Burmese pass by as in the charming abandon of perpetual holiday. They pass by in groups, sometimes to the beat of gongs, whose note, sent forth occasionally, resounds, ominous as a tocsin, through the clear morning air and seems to linger caressingly amongst the trees. Women and men alike puff at large cheroots, and their walk resembles a flower-gathering amble. But yet upon these sunlit roads you may chance at times on a very different procession, the funeral of some Hindu of the poorer class. They carry the sheeted body upon a hurdle, and the mourners, pathetic in their rags, follow with haggard faces. Life careless of to-morrow and death that has no to-morrow meet and pass to the sound of a gong that might indeed be a tolling bell.

Evening is the popular hour upon the Royal Lakes. Those who are not rowing on them are wandering by their shores or spinning round them in motor cars. In the shade of the islands the red scum of the pond-weed settles like froth under the boughs, and insects are raining on the water. One could sit there for an hour quite contentedly as the dusk gathers and the lamp-points begin to glitter amidst the further trees.

But though I enjoyed the lakes, the part of

Rangoon's outskirts I really preferred was the neighbourhood of Kokine Hill. That is delightful in its ravines and woods. I liked to go right on down the hill, leaving on the left Chin Tsong's baroque palace, a Chinese dream in coloured tiles, grotesque as a Chinese dragon and furnished in the combined splendour of East and West at its most modern and uncompromising, and so come presently to the outlying colony of Chinese, with their neat market-gardens and the pumpkins hanging in rows from the trellis-work. It was a happy sight; and though one hurried on to make the circle of the lakes and whirl back into Rangoon along the Prome Road, that thoroughly Indianized promenade, the thought of it would keep pleasantly recurring.

I never go to a large town without enquiring at once whether they possess a Zoo—I don't know why it is, but they give me a sense of peace—and therefore it wasn't many days after my arrival that I visited the one in Rangoon. It lies away in the suburbs, large in its grounds and fairly interesting in its collections. But I could wish that they would concentrate on the Burmese fauna and not bother about anything else. The thing I remember best was a monkey with a taste

for cigarettes; only, with that perversity of monkeys it would smoke them the wrong way round, which looked more like a conjuring trick than a pleasure. But perhaps the pleasure was in the trick—I don't pretend to understand much about monkeys, but I understand something about human beings.

I awoke at four one morning in my bedroom in Tamway Road and began to think of the Deity and to wonder whether, if He were a reality, He were co-existent with laws of which He is the servant (being bound by His own conception of Himself), or whether there were, as you might put it, two arcs above mankind, of which He is the lesser. I wouldn't mention this save that, getting after a time into such a state that I couldn't go to sleep, I jumped up to look out of the window, and there, flaming in the east, was the blood-red dawn. On the earth a solemn, sweet stillness had hushed even the voices of the early birds, and the morning twilight was breaking in floods upon the fields and upon the woods. It seemed almost like a portent. That, one of my latest, was decidedly the finest of the prospects Rangoon's outskirts ever gave me.

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Everybody has heard of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. It has the fame which great sanctuaries of religion acquire from the piety of devotees, but, if it be celebrated in the manner of St. Peter's or the Kabah, it is certain that Rangoon has not the holy significance of Rome or Mecca. This anachronism of an old shrine in a modern setting spoils something of that atmosphere which, derived partly from the senses, partly from historic imagination, and partly from the inherent influence of a symbol, is the true environment for so magnificent a monument.

Religions obtain in retrospect a noble dignity through the passage of the centuries and the thought of the millions who found their consolation and their pride within the fold, but these same religions appear too often tawdry when exemplified in the lives of living men. And that also may be said of the antique and mellow temples of age-old creeds. Seen from afar, the Shwe Dagon, glittering in its golden armour or shining through the darkness, has the austere splendour of a beacon, but near at hand, in the midst of its innumerable and crumbling pagodas, it assumes an aspect at once gaudy and soulless. As religions lose their purity in the course of time,

becoming overlaid with ritual and adornments, so does man little by little abandon the spirit for the letter, until at length he regards his religion more as a fetish than as a faith. This spiritual decadence can be traced in architecture, in painting, in music, and in literature, and here, at the foot of the Shwe Dagon, is dreadfully evident in the tinsel vulgarity of the dependent shrines.

Before saying more, it may be as well to give a few figures in order to convey some idea of what the Shwe Dagon is actually like. The terrace of the Pagoda, where the Faithful perambulate and the shrines are set, is 166 feet above the ground and 900 feet long by 685 feet wide. From the centre of this there springs to a height of 370 feet, with a base circumference of 1355 feet, the Pagoda itself. The hti upon its summit, a sort of network head-piece dangling with bells, is all jewel-encrusted, the upper dome is covered with eighth-of-an-inch-thick plates of solid gold, and the lower part is overlaid with burnished gold-leaf. Buddhist historians, to whom tradition is much the same as fact, give 588 B.C. as the date of the Shwe Dagon's erection, but such statements lack proof. At any rate, it is very old and very venerable, and is said to contain

not only relics of Buddha but of his three predecessors.

The Shwe Dagon was the product of a Buddhism still pristine, but those pagodas that surround it, like ugly and misshapen dwarfs, have the self-conscious fantasy of exhaustion, and though, no doubt, the gifts of sincere believers, are vitiated by the material scepticism of a tolerant age. The figure of Gautama, in one of the three traditional attitudes, seated, standing, or recumbent, simpers in a hundred corners, and the inanity of his expression is dire when we consider the beautiful allegory of the meditating Buddha. All, all has gone. This waxwork show of alabaster figures is incredibly far removed from any emotion of benign power or deep contemplation. Modern enlightenment, poisoning the ambient air of the faith, has coarsened and weakened the whole idea of its founder.

Yet, as in the cheap wayside shrines of Tirol, there is something to touch one in the very feebleness of the imaginative appeal and in the thought that humanity can obtain relief from gazing at such crudities. Religion in its essence must combine the aloof and the popular, must awake the inner chords of exaltation and appease

the broken heart, but the pity of it is that the exalted now tends to the abstract and the popular to the meretricious.

Those very shrines which fill you with disgust in one sense are humanly interesting in another. Here you can study the typical Buddhist architecture as modified by national character. China, Burma, India, Korea, Siam, Ceylon, are all represented in these fifteen hundred pagodas and thousands of images that hem the Shwe Dagon about like the filagreed fringe of a huge bell. The old shrines are tumbling to pieces, while new ones, adorned with cut glass and atrocious woodwork, are springing up and pressing out the ruins. I don't know whether the whole effect of the picture is more that of a fair or of a graveyard, but perhaps the fair predominates, with the fiery colours and barbaric designs, with the general dirt and neglect, and with the sight of the long range of covered stairs up from the roadway to the platform, guarded by their leogryphs, and alive with people and dogs in a true Oriental confusion of booths and stalls. There is gaiety upon those stairs, the gaiety of a happy people and of a mild religion, and that again is the right counterpart, theologically, to the tomb-like silence above.

As you descend the flight children press lotus-flowers upon you, dancing ahead like couriers preparing a path. A pretty fancy, but inspired, I am sorry to add, by a hope of gain. The time to leave is in the dusk, when the converging roads bring in the Burmans from the city, when the yellow-robed poongyis with their parchment umbrellas are making sedately for the monasteries, and when the gold and gold-leaf of the Shwe Dagon take on a lemon tint in the twilight. Then may you feel the poor present times to be obliterated and Rangoon itself but a lost name. These are the pilgrims from afar come with gifts and prayers ; they do not wish to linger in the empty plains about the river, but would worship and be gone.

At all hours of night and day the footsteps of the pious resound upon the platform of the Shwe Dagon, while the protecting nats, those singular spirits superimposed upon Buddhism from heathen times, keep it for ever in their charge. As dark falls the five tiers of electric globes hung around the plinth awake, and like a great tropic beast, mythical and argus-eyed, the Pagoda gleams and winks. One could never forget that sight, and especially if seen upon the

night of Tazaungdaing, the Festival of Lights, which falls in November in a triumphant annual vindication of the spirit of Buddhism. The zayats and the tazaungs are lit up then, candles burn in their myriads, and a huge crowd, ever reinforced, slowly encircles the platform, tight-packed and cheerful, to the ringing of bells and the carrying of religious insignia. Above it all, remote, unmoved, sweeps the shining Pagoda with an intense majesty of repose in that scene of devout surrender and tumultuous praise. One could imagine the great whisper of its heart echoing the words of long ago, "Peace, be still!"

RANGOON JOTTINGS—II

In Eastern communities where the European population is small, social life is not so much a pleasure as an escape from yourself. People thoroughly on each other's nerves meet night after night in a desperate effort to forget the boredom of their own existence. This reason, of course, does not apply to the same extent in a town like Rangoon, with a white colony running into thousands, but even here there is a slightly artificial strain of forced gaiety. To meet your fellows is not only a pleasure, it is also a duty you owe to yourself and to your nationality. That is one reason why club life is so common throughout the East. The club is not alone a place of enjoyment, it is a symbol of racial solidarity. It justifies your pride in being English without any ulterior implication; it is the non-committal halfway house between indifference and friendship.

There are various clubs in Rangoon with memberships nicely graded (in principle) according to social acceptability, but the largest and most generally popular is the Gymkhana Club, known all over Burma as the Gym, which, founded as a sporting club, is now equally notable for its dances and its bar. Its large buildings and playing-grounds, situated on the borders of the town, wake into life each evening about dusk and are shrouded again by half-past nine. But during these few hours Rangoon society, especially on the three nights a week when the Club's own band plays in the Club's own ballroom, is to be found there in force. From out the seething town, in which the white element is a mere needle in a haystack, the Club, like a strong magnet, draws its members in gharris and motors. It is almost as if another current were turned on with the turning on of the electric light. That, at any rate, is true of those members to whom the bar is the nightly airing place of convivial conversation. At these casual Club meetings the talk ranges over all sorts of subjects, from horse-racing to theology, the circles at the different tables widen as man after man draws up a chair, and in the constant replenishment of your glass

topic slides into topic with no incongruity. "Boy, give me a chit," resounds here and there, and that blessèd word, which in Rangoon is the real equivalent of Arabian magic, and seems, at the moment, to convey no uneasiness as to a future settlement, acts as fresh coal upon the vanished fire of empty glasses. It is sad to record that these pleasant meetings have a tendency to break up unexpectedly in the remembrance of waiting wives and dinners. There is a touch of guilty haste in the swift melting of the hospitable crowd, and one would occasionally find oneself left alone with disconcerting suddenness, as though a drop-curtain had fallen on a brilliant and vociferous spectacle.

Rangoon society is essentially Scottish, and the clan-element in its blood assures to any fellow-countryman a comprehensive welcome. All communities, naturally, have their touchy points, inordinately developed in certain individuals, and I would not deny that this town needs a careful approach. But I want to emphasize that beneath its crust Rangoon is a friendly place; nobody with ordinary tact need be lonely there. Perhaps the best plan would be to arrive in the town towards the end of November,

on the eve of St. Andrew's Day. The subscription dinner given on that night of national rejoicing would soften into friendship the heart of the canniest Borderer. (I know that a gentleman sitting near me, whom I had never seen before, informed me by the end of the evening that the thought of my departure from Rangoon was unbearable.) The hour unlocks the pent-up feelings, and Scotland rises around you, knocking upon your memory, as the actual present appears more and more unreal. But though the evocation of sentiment may be the object of such gatherings, sentiment always lies near the surface of the Scot. That is why he guards his nationality under gruff disguises, and that is why one should be wary of piercing his armour in the hope of permanent benefit. He is not ashamed of his sentiment; he is ashamed of your thinking it a weakness. A Rangoon Scot will give a man a chance just because he is a brother Scot; but just because he is a brother Scot he expects the chance to be justified. The eloquent sympathy of quaichs soon ends in hard facts.

Why is it that the customs governing the social life of Europeans in Burma are so entirely different from those governing the same thing in Malaya?

Is it that India, in her vastness, is a law to herself, is it that the strip of Siam that separates the two countries creates a kind of mental hiatus, or is it mere chance? In Rangoon you call (or don't call) on other people when you arrive, in Kuala Lumpur other people call on you; in Rangoon you keep the Oriental hours for meals, in Kuala Lumpur you keep the English; in Rangoon you eat mulligatawny soup on Sunday, in Kuala Lumpur you eat curry; in Rangoon you must not wear dead-white suits, in Kuala Lumpur every man wears them; in Rangoon you must not drive in rickshaws, in Kuala Lumpur you may; in Rangoon you call the ladies memsahibs, in Kuala Lumpur you call them mems. But there are any number of these topsy-turvy differences.

Something of what one may name the ultra-propriety of Rangoon, is, I suspect, to be traced to the social fear of the Eurasians, who really seem to have made this city their headquarters. Burma, with its mere twelve million inhabitants, has, I am told, more Eurasian civil servants than the whole of India proper. "God," says a local proverb, "made the Burman, but the British soldier made the Eurasian." A mordant saying.

There doesn't appear to be any solution of the Eurasian problem save in a much closer agreement of Anglo-Indians (the correct modern term) amongst themselves. Racially they are disliked by both Europeans and Natives. I don't say it's just, because it isn't just, but it's natural. Unfortunately, the tendency of Eurasians to avoid one another in proportion as they have more white blood in their veins, makes them hopelessly disunited as a class. In Malaya all Eurasians are called Stenghas, which means " half " (the usual expression, by the way, for a whisky and soda : not, half whisky and half soda, but half a glass of whisky and soda), but in Burma, where the question is more urgent, a greater nicety is employed. There are sixteen annas to the rupee, which stands, so to say, for the ideal of pure white. Thus you designate a Eurasian's colour by any number of annas up to fifteen. It is explicit, if it is not kindly. Anglo-Indians in their desire to emphasize their European origin almost outdo the British in patriotic demonstrativeness. They are a " safe " people, and individually often estimable and obliging, but their mentality is windy and their lives are made barren by the repetition of moral truisms. Such

is their way of attempting to rise superior to the underlying bitterness of their lot.

In Rangoon there exists an odd sort of underworld in which certain European and Eurasian elements meet socially in semi-secret. It is worth discovering, if you can overcome the fanatic prejudices of the East, but it is essentially dowdy as with the dust of mental horse-hair sofas. Moreover, there is something painful in surreptitious meetings whose one hope is so slender of promise. A breath of air is needed. I had heard of that society, but had never obtained a sight of it until I was escorted one evening to the house of some Eurasians to attend a spiritualistic séance. It was a most bizarre affair. There were several Europeans present, several Anglo-Indians, a highly intelligent Brahmin, and a mystical English youth who announced his intention of calling up the spirit of some unrevealed lady. We " concentrated " on a bowl of flowers, were warned not to be alarmed at anything, held hands, and waited in the hot dark for revelations. I felt very bored, the youth sighed dramatically once or twice, and presently it was stated that the atmosphere was unpropitious. Some acknowledged sceptics were sternly reprimanded, and

when I asked mildly, Would the spiritualists kindly inform me whether there was or was not a God, I was looked at askance. Yet, silly as the whole thing was as an exhibition, it was quite interesting as a sidelight on one of the obscurer corners of Rangoon life.

Indeed, when one talks of English society in a place like Rangoon, one must always remember that there are a number of English people who don't belong to any recognized society, but just float about in the furtive flotsam and jetsam of a great city, the sort of people who suddenly appear in your office with an enormous bundle of papers and a frightfully intricate grievance against a Government department, and then fade away with a disillusioned expression, never to be seen again unless it be dodging round corners into notorious bars. God knows where or how they live; probably they have a Burmese mistress in some miserable back-street and subsist on curry, which they eat with their fingers, squatting on the floor. These are the people who know the East and have heard its fatal voice. (I want to ask this question: Is there any other nation save the British that, where only a handful of its members are gathered together in some outlandish hole, is

sure to produce a few that are not " received " ? It's most extraordinary. I'm not thinking of Rangoon, which is a city—though Rangoon has made me think of it—I'm thinking at the moment of a tiny little mining settlement I used to know on the further slopes of the Peruvian Andes. There were about a dozen Englishmen in it who composed society, and there were two or three others lurking about on the edge who were as much out of it as a tramp would be at a peer's garden party. What on earth they were even doing there—they weren't connected with the mine—is more than I ever ascertained.)

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The bird-life of Rangoon is abundant, but at first glance monotonous. It is the crows, near relations to the common Indian crows that haunt Colombo, which cause, at once, its abundance and its monotony. The appearance of these crows is unpleasant, their voice harsh, their numbers monstrous, their habits disgusting, and their value infinitesimal. In the rainy season they lord it, undisputed, over the town ; but when the dry weather comes kites fill the pale sky above the streets with effortless and mazy circles. Although a scavenger, the kite is an

aristocrat, and the venom of his glittering eyes is tinged with contempt; but as for the crow, he is a hopping plebeian, a petty thief, and his eyes are roving with the perpetual greediness of a hungry stomach. The kite expresses his superiority by a menacing scream, the crow his backstairs inquisitiveness by an everlasting caw. Of the two, I prefer the kite.

The cousins of these birds are vultures, whose affections, I am sorry to say, are centred in the neighbourhood of slaughter-houses. Sometimes you may see them quartering the sky, and then, indeed, they are majestic as the dark angels hastening towards the earth, but on the ground, with their sinister humped backs and their clumsy shuffle, they look worthy of the offal which is their delight. When I lived at Insein, which is a dismal hole at best, I had good opportunities of watching them. There was a waste field there on the edge of a sort of swamp which represented, if I may say so, the quintessence of a charnel-house in its mixture of bones, smells, dreariness, furtive pi-dogs, and waiting vultures, who would flop upon the thrown-out refuse with a tearing hiss.

I remember watching in a tree behind the

Strand Hotel, near the docks, the nesting of a pair of the beautiful white egrets known locally as paddy birds. But they prefer usually the outskirts of the city, and may be observed in flocks any evening in a wide common by the side of Mill Road just below the Royal Lakes. At sunset you may see them stringing in single line across these lakes, their white wings faintly flushed as with a reflection of sky and water and their breast-bones sticking out sharply like the prows of tiny ships. They used to remind me of a fleet of fishing-boats flapping homewards in calm weather with their sails full set.

To return to the crows : the authorities declare that they are responsible for many crimes against sanitation, and I would add to that list another crime, the crime of making it almost impossible for small birds to exist in Rangoon. I don't say that their presence affects the sparrows or the swallows that skim and swoop about Fytche Square, but it does affect the shy garden-birds. Occasionally you may notice these shot-silk visitors, beautiful and wild-hearted, but what is the use of building a nest when the crows are there to devour the eggs and the young birds ? These Peeping Toms skulk on every tree and

nothing escapes them. They are the jackals of the air, and though, when you first arrive, it is rather agreeable to be woken up with the illusion that you are in the midst of an English rookery, that soon palls before the annoyance of being woken up at all.

But the suburbs do contain other birds, too large for the predatory habits of the crows: for instance, the king-crow with his fork tail and his jet plumage, and the mynah, who has all the cheekiness of the starlings and the troupials rolled into one. Whether walking or flying, mynahs look fussy and absorbed, as though they were everlastingly finding themselves late for an important appointment. But I imagine that they are really lazy little wretches. . . .

One day of late September I was feeling too unwell to leave the house or even to dress. But by about ten o'clock the sun was shining so cheerfully that I went out of my room as I was and leant over the balcony. There was a small garden below, bordered by a dwarf hedgerow of flowering shrubs, and along this border was passing a procession of the most gorgeous butterflies. Some sailed high overhead, as if the mere perfume were sufficient for them, some lingered

amidst the blossom, but, while I watched, the procession went on, incredibly varied and lovely, wavering over the flowers like autumn petals blown about by the wind. I think I had fever on me that day, for everything had the vaguely symbolic significance of a heated brain, and those butterflies, floating endlessly out of the north and dipping from me beyond the garden, seemed like the very spirit of the free morning or of the dancing elves.

Burma is certainly marvellous in her butterflies. In place of the gentian-coloured morphos of Brazil, there are velvet blacks and oranges, blues, reds, and the apple-greens of old Chinese vases. No wonder the country produces enthusiastic collectors. I met one of them some time after this, a real authority, and I described to him the finest butterfly I had seen. "Ah," said he, "that must be so-and-so." I thanked him, but I felt displeased. The nomenclature of learnèd classifiers is not always happy, and it was grievous to think that my fragile visitor was burdened with a Latin name of ten syllables. There are various kinds of imagination. . . .

As the rains near their end, one grows more and more conscious of the nocturnal army of Rangoon

insects. It isn't the mosquitoes one minds so much ; they are, as you might term it, a normal pest, and as such can be endured. No, what one objects to is the plague of obscure and nameless insects that emerge in periodic crops, leaving one breathless. I used to detest especially a species of green-fly that positively swarmed in the misty haze of its thousands, got mixed up in everything, and seemed to multiply by death. My boy had to sweep them up in shovelfuls every morning. But that, after all, was only the most insistent of innumerable pests, outrageous in their variety. Giant beetles would precipitate themselves out of the void on to my table, dragging their obscene bodies across the cloth, and odious things would make a play-ground of the floor.

All my life I have been worried about insects, from this capacity of theirs for being or not being at will to their invincible numbers and tireless activity. And why does a lamp attract them ? People too readily assume that the statement of a fact is its explanation, but merely to remark that insects are naturally attracted by light explains nothing. And consider how, with one accord, they vanish at the promise of day ! Do they slink off like hyænas or do they evanesce like

ghosts? To a Buddhist, the life of the meanest of insects is sacred, but, not being a Buddhist, I have many a time longed for more of these little chirruping lizards on my walls. I liked to watch their slow stalk and swift dart; it was a healthy antidote to one's feelings of morbid irritation.

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Ocean-going steamers are for ever moving up and down the Rangoon river, and on the long frontage of the city, moored against the wharves or to buoys in mid-stream, the many loading vessels give one some idea of the greatness of the port. Warehouses shut the river off from the town, but I liked to stroll about the sheds, filled as they were with the smell of strange merchandise, where the tally clerks sat with notebooks and the sweating coolies toiled, and to look forth upon the terrific activity of the broad river. The tide runs strong and few captains will venture from their ships at night, when, if a sampan fouls an anchor-chain in the dark, it is as likely as not to upset. I know that on moonless nights when I have had to go out into mid-stream the boatman would creep along the shore, which seemed perpetually running away from him under the swirling eddies, and then would dart out into the blackness and

make a regular fight for it. It was an uncomfortable feeling and altogether queer with the lights around one on different levels and the gurgle of the running water beneath.

The Rangoon river is really of the nature of a tidal creek. It ends about a hundred miles above Rangoon, and, though it does carry down a certain amount of Irrawaddy water, it cannot properly be called, as it so often is, one of the mouths of that river. But its pilot service, next to the pilot service of the Hooghli, is the most responsible and the best paid in all the East. The twenty pilots on the list have to bring to the monotony of a constantly repeated task a kind of sixth sense in the reading of a problem always liable to vary from week to week. The whole life of the river is change and these changes have to be countered. It is like playing a game of chess blindfolded.

I became very friendly with some of the pilots —I had travelled out with two of them—and once went to stay on their brig after a bout of fever. One took me down with him. As he and I stepped off the launch and climbed up the ladder of the old tramp she was already casting loose from the buoy. Five minutes later we were feeling our way against the current, and presently we had

slipped past Monkey Point and were well out in the reaches of the Rangoon river. On that clear afternoon the town behind us lay very still beneath the glitter of the Shwe Dagon, and all its life seemed centred on the water, with its traffic of sampans and tugs, with the sound of winches working on the steamers, with the jumbled mass of masts and funnels conjuring up the four quarters of the globe with the vision of long toil upon the restless sea. Before us the storage tanks and tall chimneys of the oil-works rose up on the left, while on our right the plain of the delta, soon to open out on either side, appeared to wilt under the tropic sun. The Pegu river, winding through its flats, came rolling into the main stream, and its brown flood, joining the brown flood of the Rangoon, brought down yet more silt to add to the shifting shoals and banks about the channel.

High tide, which enables heavy-draught ships to enter the port, conceals with its treacherous, smoothing hand, the hidden dangers of the river. Swirling eddies above sunken sand-bars and spits awash round which the water laps and creams, that, so many warning signals, show up here and there as the tide recedes, are all submerged in the

advancing flow; but the pilot bringing down a vessel in the fulness of the river, sees, as it were, another landscape beneath the surface. Unlike the emptiness of the deep sea the river veils named and perilous patches, and the chart, sprinkled thick with soundings, tells its story to the navigator whether in the swell of a spring tide or in the pitch dark of a starless night. It is only fog or blinding rain squalls or a race against the falling ebb that cause him anxiety, but in the familiarity of years is generated an almost infallible instinct, and it needs but one peep of the shore, one sight of the river, to tell him where he is or how the water lasts.

Like all travellers I have felt the pilot's legendary appeal. I, too, have followed him with my thoughts in the hush that falls over an outward-bound ship as he goes over the side; I, too, have strained my eyes ahead to see him standing up in his boat as you approach the land. Your last and first contact with the shore! The pilot is the one man in a ship who seems to carry about with him an air of solid reality, as though he were subtly bound up with the spirit of that earth you are leaving behind, or meeting again as a stranger from the deep. I have watched pilots come aboard

in all sorts of weather, from the serene calm of the tropics, in which, in their neat duck, they look as if they were just off to some miraculous garden party, to bitter northern storms, in which, wrapped to the eyes in oilskins and sou'-westers, they emerge dripping out of the waves like drowned mermen, but I have never known a pilot take charge of a vessel who did not at once, by the mere prestige of his presence, spread complete confidence over the whole company. That curse of modern life, amateurishness, finds no place in the pilot service. The sea doesn't encourage amateurs, it eliminates them. An amateur on land is merely a failure, at sea he is a menace.

Elephant Point, which marks the boundary of the shore, is twenty-two miles from Rangoon, and from there nothing of it is visible save one glimpse of the golden Pagoda towering on its knoll. I was having an excellent cold lunch with the captain at that moment, but I ran out and saw before me the open sea, not blue as one would fondly suppose, but fouled with the mud of the interior. We passed the red lightship and, veering round to starboard, made one by one the buoys that mark the channel through the heaped mud

of the guilty river. And then, straight ahead, twenty-four miles beyond the point, appeared the Pilot brig, a tiny, forlorn speck in the distance, lost seemingly in the wastes of the discoloured gulf. Gradually we drew up to her where she rode, dipping to the slight chop of the waves. Then clambering down the rope-ladder into her boat, we made for her lee side, while the steamer set her course for Calcutta, a thousand miles off.

The brig, built at Dalla, opposite Rangoon, for this special purpose, had a rough touch of smoking-room comfort about her. The inside had been hollowed out into a large room, and there the pilots, just off duty or awaiting a ship, could pass the time as they chose. All was peaceful on board the brig, all was untouched by the hurry of the land. In fact, nothing of the land was even visible save the faintest broken line of palms, that, as the ship swung with the tide, appeared with clock-like regularity on either beam, as though, in its insubstantial airiness, it were able to play upon us some endless and inscrutable joke.

Like the happy isles which the lotus-eaters inhabit, the brig, too, could throw a spell. The very fish and prawns, of which at certain seasons

her net would bring up its yield, had the look of those who would willingly struggle no more as they fell listless upon the deck. In the daytime ships came and went with strange unconcern. The boat was lowered, the steamer glided by with way upon her, and another pilot had left or had arrived. But at night the process was apt to awaken a sleeper lying on deck in his camp-bed under the awning. Sitting up, rubbing my eyes, I have seen the ghost of a great, glowing ship upon our bow, which, melting as I watched, left me alone with the dim sea gently heaving beneath the brig.

I shall never forget the few days of my visit; but as all good things have their end (even the brig herself was then doomed and has been replaced now by a steam sloop), it was inevitably my turn at last to follow a pilot over the side and board a steamer bound up the river. Behind us the little brig took again her solitary aspect and sank gradually into the sea. Our eyes were turned shoreward for good and all where slowly the landscape grew about the river's mouth, which opened ahead in the vacant frame of the formless scrub. Two and a half hours later we had crossed the Hastings.

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Towards the middle of September one would often hear in the Gymkhana Club this sentence, "The snipe are in." It was a remark followed by secret conclaves and vows exchanged in dark corners, and one soon came to perceive that exact information on this subject is not readily obtainable and would be inexpedient to publish. Therefore I will not say precisely where I went snipe-shooting, though I suppose there is no harm in mentioning that it was within thirty miles of Rangoon.

It was past two when my friend and I emerged from the dâk bungalow, to which the coolies had carried our provisions, into the glare of the afternoon. The noontide hush of the tropics lay deep upon the wide landscape of the paddy-fields, and in that full sunlight there was a sense of trance and unreality. The romance of scenery arises either from total contrast with what you have known, arousing one set of emotions, or from a delicate hint of association, arousing another, but such words as beauty and ugliness have, I think, little meaning in themselves. I looked out upon that vast monotony, not as I would have looked upon the living monotony of downs or uplands, but as I might have gazed

upon some strange dead scene within the moon. The mystery of shadow had departed from the earth, that mystery which is of the very essence of romantic reveries, but in its place there seemed to be the mystery of a fourth dimension. The violent contrast of blue sky and green fields, the benumbed stillness, the unwinking fixity—all this affected me with the kind of shock one has in studying a language that has no affinities with one's own or a person with whom one can find no point of sympathetic contact.

Presently, on the edge of a large expanse of paddy, my friend and I parted, he with his two bearers to the right, I with my two bearers to the left. I began to get ready and slipped in a couple of No. 8's. But the real battle, I soon found, had to do with mud rather than with birds. In the midst of the growing rice are scattered swamp-like wastes, full of rain-water and slimy clods, and there it is that the snipe pass their days. My bearers no sooner saw such a patch than they firmly directed me into the middle of it, where I floundered about, pulling one leg after another through the squelch of the soft ooze. Then up would get the snipe, bang would go my gun, and away would

fly the birds with that wild, free, mounting flight of theirs. On such an occasion my chief bearer would emit a series of most unseemly groans, as though all were lost, including honour, and I finally had to correct him with severity. Nevertheless, I did shoot some snipe—very few. I don't exactly know how, but I shot them. There they were, the brown birds, with their long beaks, and their beady eyes already glazing. It was better when I missed.

After a time I became extremely fatigued by this contest with the marsh, and coming to a sluggish stream, rested on its bank. It is singular what variety of picture greets you in the mazes of the flat paddy-grounds. From without they bear the appearance of a dreary sameness, but lost within their depths they reveal their own quiet individuality. And ever about you flits the bird-life of the delta—especially a little plover that I was constantly mistaking for a snipe. In the distance I heard my friend's gun going off, but as for me, I determined to make my way back to the bungalow.

I don't mind being coated with mud up to my middle, but when to that are added unspeakable weariness and the uttermost limits of per-

spiration, then it is time to retire. I got up and looked about me. The sun was still bright, but there was now a faint film upon its face. The railway station, beyond which our bungalow lay, looked a mere dot in the far-off, and thinking of the trudge back I began to ask myself what, in heaven's name, I was doing here, wandering about in such horrible discomfort. Man is simply perverse by nature. He gets furious about an argument, and then suddenly for no conceivable reason, quite calm, he invents preposterous theories about Bacon writing Shakespeare, also for no conceivable reason, he is terrified of his views growing out of date, as if a man with side-whiskers and the costume of 1860 were actually no longer a man, he temperamently (which means everlastingly) believes that it is possible to eat his cake and have it, and, worst of all, he goes snipe-shooting in a swamp under a tropical sun.

I arrived back at last, and I pulled off my clammy clothes, and I lived my hour in the tin bath of a dâk bungalow. I had dressed myself before I heard my friend approaching, and as I went forth to meet him, the broad western sky was red and the night was at hand. The earth

had suddenly grown more human, and I saw some cattle, as they might have been cattle in an English pasture, straggling over a field towards a clump of trees about the hidden village. The charm of the brief dusk interpenetrated all, and in that moment of revelation Burma itself seemed homely to my awakened senses. I shall preserve that memory. Nor shall I forget our journey back to Rangoon, when, beyond the plains, above which the Southern stars glittered with the coldness of an Arctic night, there appeared, very distant and distinct, the glowing cone of the Shwe Dagon. Its five tiers of lights were blended into one, and, standing out upon the darkness, it arose a burning and immortal witness of a country's faith.

MANDALAY

TWILIGHT was falling as I left Rangoon and the ripening paddy-fields beyond the town took on a deeper tinge of yellow beneath the low rays of the dwindling sun. Indeed, we had hardly crossed the Pegu river, coiling and glinting to the sea, when leaden darkness descended altogether and the lights of Syriam shone out across the plain. I am probably one of the few people (under ninety) who still prefer railways to motor cars, and I do so because of the snug feeling of the contrast, because a train is like a miniature home, and because from it one can watch the flying country in windless ease.

I shared my compartment with a sportsman from Meiktila, who entertained me through the night with stories of wild animals and wild adventures. We had our morning tea together at Yamethin, very welcome after the cold early

hours, but at Thazi he left and I made the rest of the journey alone. We had slipped out of the delta during dark, and at dawn a range of hills appeared on either hand, far-off and pearly, witness of the night's accomplishment. It was delicious to lean out of the window and see a new world opening before one. A stunted scrub jungle stretched across the flats to the distant hills, with here and there pools of water, breaks of paddy, villages amidst trees, dotted pagodas, moss-hidden in dilapidated age or whitewashed in just-finished newness. Morning certainly pours upon the earth something of the elixir of one's own rejuvenation, but the sight of this world was, itself, good. The hills upon my left vanished presently, only to reappear near Mandalay, but those upon my right kept up with the train, sometimes drawing near, sometimes receding, but rich with promise in their grey and wooded undulations. My companion had pointed them out to me as his happy hunting-grounds. "You can hear the elephant in the bamboo jungle a mile away," said he, "and as for the tsaing, they'll snort fifty yards from you and be gone, but you won't see them. And there's fishing in the streams; a kind of mountain trout,

and carp, and small mahseer. I caught forty-eight one afternoon. By Jove, I don't want to leave Burma." And really I don't see why he should.

The train ran smoothly, ascending hardly a foot a mile, and travel was a joy in the lack of curves and tunnels. I had full comfort to gaze out upon the beautiful bird-life of lower Burma. It grew more exotic as we passed further inland, and reached its climax in gorgeous rollers, very similar to the blue jays I used to watch in the bush-veld sixty miles north of Pretoria, and little bright-green bee-eaters that clung to the telegraph wires. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and was half sorry when we drew into Mandalay about half-past one that afternoon. And though I suppose the chances are against my ever taking that journey again, it pleases me to think that every night that same train is still leaving Rangoon and every morning finds it upon the plains. The conservative streak in all our natures revels in the thought of unchanged continuity, and the vividness of memory is enormously helped by knowing that things are happening now just as they happened when you were there.

Mandalay lies four hundred miles inland, and

I can't imagine why Mr. Kipling led us all to believe that it was on the sea-coast. In one sense, no doubt, flying-fish also play on the road from London to Brighton, but it would entail a roundabout trip. However, not being a poet, I will content myself with something less romantic, and will try simply to give an idea of the Mandalay I saw. I won't go further than to say "try," because, though I have various clear notions, I will not guarantee their value. You cannot answer the important questions of life by monosyllables, and in a similar way, definite knowledge of the kind most people acquire is not necessarily the safest key to true deductions. The more one knows about a place, the more does one tend to compromise in one's assertions. And I'm not sure that I want to compromise.

The first thing that struck me about Mandalay was the huge empty shell of its size, the second thing was its air of lethargy (quite different from the lethargy of Rangoon), the third thing was the immense number of its inert and homeless dogs, which in untold numbers litter the streets, caring no more, as you motor by, for their lives than for yours, and the fourth thing—the urgent truth about Mandalay—was compounded of these three

obvious facts: Mandalay, with its palaces and its temples, is a city of yesterday crumbling visibly before the stress of the modern world. It is old Burma dying by inches, and vilely set upon by the fungus of European civilization. The great distances of the town, the moated walls of the Fort, the thousand pagodas, yes, even the number of the forlorn dogs, all are symbolic of faded glories in their present heavy sense of exhaustion. And yet there is something more. The past may at times appear to absorb the present, the present to swallow up the past, but in this place the present appears to brood alike upon the past and upon the future. In its material decay, countered by the subterranean energy of religious zeal, Mandalay seems to rest in a trance between the outworn and the new. Still, as of old, as of ages, indeed, before the days when it was a Royal capital, Mandalay is the Buddhist "Centre of the Universe." It is full of the memories of long ago, and of a faith that abides for ever and brings us wanderers home at last.

Above all the sights of Mandalay there are four, in particular, that stand out: the moated Fort, Thibaw's Palace, the Aracan Pagoda, and

crowned Mandalay Hill. The Fort, unlike most things, may best be described by statistics, because in its very appearance there is the epitome of accurate, angular design. It is a vast square, one and a quarter miles in each direction, and it is surrounded by a crenellated red-brick wall twenty-six feet in height, with thirteen teak watch-towers on each face. Without the wall, a moat of clearest water, seventy-five yards wide and crossed by five bridges, invests the citadel, and gives to that parched scene an air of sumptuous serenity. White bastions by the gates help to break the long monotony of the wall, and behind it, in the remoteness, the blue ridge of the Shan Hills suffers at dusk a silken transfiguration. It is as if the dross of matter had been combed out of the world, whose spirit, with the simulacrum of form upon it still, softly uprose in the fairy twilight of the tropics. The whole landscape is one beautiful and immaterial vision. Such was the very picture that in the mid-years of last century met the eyes of the new levies to Mindon's army. But no longer does the lotus bloom upon the moat, no longer does the gilded barge of the king pass slowly on, no longer do the trumpets sound from the high red walls.

Ah, it is an embattled sight, unique, Burmese to the core !

Thibaw's Palace lies in the flat centre of the Fort, just behind the buildings of the Upper Burma Club, where sleepy-eyed servants lounge about the deserted rooms until the evening rush, and it is carefully preserved by Government as a formal example of the Burmese Nandaw. It is a fantastic structure, with its teak wood carved into ornate designs, crude and clumsy in their striving after a Christmas-tree effect, yet almost dignified in the sheer national excess of its eccentricity and in the silence of its empty halls. But I must say I found no particular interest in this flamboyant Palace—that type of architecture becomes more impossible the more it strives—though no doubt the sentimentalist would discover all he wants in thoughts on vanished pomp and lost ambition.

The Aracan Pagoda is situated several miles without the Fort, in the direction of the Irrawaddy. On the road thither, driving slowly through the morning heat, you pass the Zegyo Bazaar, a municipal undertaking of incredible size and prosaic aspect. I examined it from end to end, stunned by the enormous efforts of

commerce in an enfeebled town and frightfully aware of poverty behind the heaped bales. That place of endless goods for which there are no purchasers is like starvation in the desert with your hands full of diamonds. Of course, I don't mean to infer that Mandalay is not still a populous city (it contains to-day 160,000 inhabitants), but only that its tide has ebbed—though they do say that there are signs of revival—and that despondency lies rank upon its listless hordes. The stagnation is but emphasized by the busy idleness of its giant bazaar. I was glad to get into my gharri again and drive on to Aracan. There, indeed, you may feel the difference between old vitality and new decay. The clustering courts and passages of this ancient shrine, the pools, the crowds, the pagodas, all make up one curious maze of splendour and of squalor in a tortuous setting of Oriental lavishness and disorder. Life animates this scene of muddled stone and eager humanity. Ruins mingle with fresh plaster, like the old and young who swarm with equal fervour around the holy spots.

I walked through the thronged ways and by the twilight stalls, I saw the three-headed elephant of bronze, I traversed the paved courts and the borders

of the sacred tanks. Coming from the presence of the great Buddha of Aracan, whose face alone of all the Buddhas I have seen bore something of calm majesty in its gaze, I wandered out of the covered, Eastern closeness, thick with the smell of guttering candles and of sweating people, into the sunlight of the pools. The very water looks agèd in its coating of green slime, and the margin flagstones are worn from the feet of the countless devout. Throw in a handful of rice and the putrid liquid is stirred by plunging fish and the seal-like heads of turtles, whose carapaces, as they dive again, cut closing lanes through the greasy surface. In the Temple you are urged to buy gold-leaf to adorn the Buddha, and here, girls, laughing gaily at your refusal, press food upon you at exorbitant prices wherewith to feed the dwellers of the water and thus gain merit. Above me kites whistled in the blue, and the dust of Mandalay penetrated everywhere, while about this labyrinth of a shrine the Burmese came and went without a pause. Mandalay may die, but it will be a Burmese death. This is no cosmopolitan city like Rangoon.

If it be impossible to form for oneself, how much more impossible is it to convey to others,

any clear impression of Aracan's tumultuous irrationality. I climbed to the summit of a lofty tower and looked down upon it, upon that town within a town, upon that mixture of sleep and energy, upon that patchwork of dissolving old and rising new, upon that symbol of a little-understood religion. Buddhism finds grace in the idea of a perpetual re-incarnation, and, as you must pass spiritually from cycle to cycle, so should each generation give a concrete new admission of the wheel of change. That is why, with but few exceptions, pagodas are left to perish while others are built in their stead. Burmans do not visit a pagoda to worship in our sense but to repeat sayings of Gautama, and thus they do not usually feel, as Christians feel, that the soul of their religion is enshrined in fanes dedicated for centuries to its use.

The historic pagodas, like those of the Shwe Dagon and Aracan, are in the keeping of trustees, who administer the funds and direct the procedure. It is only recently that the Young Burmans, fired by the example of extremist Indians, have sought to make political capital out of their religion by an attempt to force Europeans to remove their shoes when visiting

the pagodas. If they want you to do it, well, the best thing is to do it—you needn't visit their pagodas—but the agitation is artificial. This is not a polemical treatise, so I shall not discuss the question of Indian unrest and how far it is likely to affect Burma, a country profoundly antipathetic to the Indian ideal, but I would like to point out that the bewildering variety of views that are expressed on this subject are just on a par with the extremely varied and dogmatic opinions of those who discuss prohibition. It's all biassed by your individuality, your preferences, your capacity for dovetailing your preconceived ideas into the structure of what you observe. There is unrest in India, there is also rest. But newspapers, that thrive on scares and disasters, do not write leading articles on the peacefulness of the ordinary man, but on the subversive cunning of the exceptional man. You can't expect anything else. Yet events tend to be more endurable on the spot than they sound thousands of miles away, and I often think that a good antidote to, say, an alarmist article in the *Pioneer* would be a recent number of, say, the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*.

Indeed, one may experience the same pleasant

reaction in England, when with the sense of universal cataclysm derived from the morning paper, one goes out and reads on a placard "Latest from Newmarket."

All Mandalay, it must be understood, is riddled with pagodas, rampant with them. It is a kind of Benares of the Buddhist world. As you climb Mandalay Hill, itself a place of pilgrimage topped by shrines, one of which is to hold in time the veritable records of the Lord found at Peshawar and now housed at Aracan, you look down upon them in their hundreds, white or gilt, losing themselves amidst the trees like giant ant-heaps of another age. A sublime panorama! North and south the country spreads out infinitely, mapped in tree-spattered golden paddy-fields; to the east the Shan Hills mount in fading lines, and to the west, beyond the Irrawaddy, the low hills of Sagaing close the horizon. I wonder how many a fervent Buddhist, toiling to the summit with his pilgrim's stone, must have stopped to stare about him, and have found in the view's vast calm a surer answer to his hopes than would be vouchsafed him before the images above? No doubt the fatal delusion of pantheism has gained converts on Mandalay Hill.

I made, in all, three short visits to Mandalay, and I have several social recollections of varied intensity. Amongst other things, I came in for Mandalay "Week," a gallant attempt to instil into that scattered European community a common purpose of gaiety through the medium of a fixed programme. I don't know whether it was exactly a success, that's to say, it did seem to me that towards the end there was a certain air of strain, but just as quite stupid people can occasionally say rather clever things when they are annoyed, so quite nice people can occasionally become rather "difficult" when they are overwrought. There are uncomfortable possibilities in the underworld of every character. However, I suppose it's all right enough, and I will add that the "Week," whether a triumph or not, brought out marked hospitality to a stranger like myself, who had no conceivable claim whatsoever to be included in the festivities. I, at least, enjoyed what I saw of it. But I should not like to live in Mandalay for ever—no, I should not like to live there even for a year. The languor of the town's corroding air is too visible. The white population is fighting a losing game against the lassitude of a dying centre. In that dust and heat, in that spurious

vitality, they cannot but be conscious of a certain futility, and though they may not work it out philosophically, it is visible in their rattled nerves. Life must be a sombre affair in Mandalay, save just in the twilight hours, and the face of its withered beauty must be a burden to contemplate year in and year out. If everything were to end, if the town were to be gulped by the jungle, and the memory of the last white man were to die out from all but the folk-tales of a future generation, then, perhaps, some groper in the backward would describe to those who are to come the heroism of an alien community who kept a brave face before the intangible terror of a creeping death. But till that happens their cheerfulness and their fortitude, very real things in this atmosphere of decay, will go unsung.

A BURMESE HILL-STATION

To rise in a few hours out of the Mandalay plain, dusty and languid in the heat of its tropic vegetation, on to the Maymyo plateau with its air of Northern summer, with its flowering shrubs, and with its park-like scenery, is like rising into pure day out of a pit. The ascent can be made either by train or motor, and, going one way and returning the other, I obtained many an angled view from the banks of the forest-clad hills. The great flats lie far beneath, still and illimitable as a waveless sea, and with the downward-sloping woods flushed in the riotous colours of the dying year. An epic sight, which, caught in the sudden twist of line or road, floats before you for an instant only to be lost in the surrounding jungle. It is almost as though one were to hear through a door, opened and shut at intervals, the crashing bars of some tremendous fugue, and, indeed, looking on such vistas one does feel that every

sense is somehow engaged in gathering up the proportions and spirit of the whole.

You pass out of the heat of Mandalay, out of that hopeless dry-zone heat which Rangoon never knows, as a man climbs to salvation. And as you gaze down, the blur of the dust upon the plain is like a cloud of poison in the memory of tormented noons. The silence of the forest, surging about you tier on tier, is sweet after the numbed silence of the flats. It is in the first lap of the ascent that the contrast strikes one so enormously. I stared out and I saw already dwarfed beneath me the lines of sidings at the foot of the hill, where the engines wait to help the trains up the slope, and I saw the shunting trucks and the puffs of steam, and it was just as though I were watching a little toy panorama enacted by manikins in a corner of a boundless expanse. In these first few moments everything below appears slightly unreal, as if you were awakening out of a gruesome nightmare. It is a much more extraordinary feeling than I can put into words, but the sum total of it is perfectly delicious. The tightness in your brain is being loosed and the world is becoming once more the real world of a kindred spirit.

If the finest thing about Maymyo is the approach thither, the least interesting thing about it is the town itself. That is squalid enough in its ineffective newness, but the winding vague avenues of the residential quarter, calm in their leafy shade and bright with the scarlet of poinsettia, the purple of bougainvillæa, and the yellow of bignonia, are entrancing. They did well who chose this spot as the hot-weather residence of the Lieutenant-Governor. It is, of course, the altitude of 3300 feet that gives the charm; the atmosphere is soft, it fills your lungs with new life and penetrates your being with a sort of purring contentment. Each day grows more desirable in that dulcet and vibrant air. You begin to think with horror of the baking plains, you begin to forget that you are in Asia. I am glad I visited Maymyo in its off-season; it had then no tinge of the ulterior motive. I did not see it so much as a setting to pleasure, as pleasure itself. It yielded me of its very essence, of that essence I might have missed in more crowded hours of amusement. About Maymyo my memories are as nearly unalloyed as they are about any place. My mind was free from care, not excited, as at my first view of Penang, but,

as it were, relaxed. I rested in one of those rare pauses outside the strife. Yes, as things turned out I am glad I saw Maymyo when I did, but if I had been there at another time I should have been glad of that too. I am quite gregarious, yet here I was alone most of the time without being lonely. Man, finding joy and disillusionment in his fellows, must return occasionally to the earth as to one who will mirror unendingly the reflection of his own self-pity or of his exultant dreams. (Isn't the shyness of youth often the first sign of egomania ?) Maymyo is the kind of place to increase our false consciousness of physical immortality. In that wonderful sense of health it doesn't seem possible to die and leave all this. For the really terrible thing about death is not annihilation, it is the thought that everything will go on just the same without us. The inflexible gaze of the dark stranger unmasks the secret egotism of our being. If we are to die, let the world be blotted out ! Then we would all be equal and none of us would mind and we could raise one final shout of defiance.

It's a nice, homely wish, but here, at Maymyo, the primitive savagery of egotism was gone, though not its force. One looked about and

absorbed the whole landscape into the service of one's immediate need. It was only another side of the universality of that emotion which devours us all, from the elderly cynic to the youth aflame for life. Silently, one sums people up and lays them aside, just as, silently, the same process is being applied to oneself. Who has not discovered disillusioning traits about almost everybody he knows, traits too ingrained to be even worth discussing? In the solitariness of our inner life the passion of the ego would steal from the very world an impress of our own desires. Yes. Humanity's noblest qualities have base copies evolved by our inherent selfishness. It is character that is rare. How many people are truly affected by the sorrows of others? Even when the ties are close, it is your own emotions that upset you, giving you waves of tenderness or despair. The self-sacrifice of love, triumphant at its height, will fade at the first cold breath. There are exceptions, there are people who give all and ask little, but they are, indeed, uncommon. In most of us tolerance is nine-tenths a longing for ease and the wish not to hurt, nine-tenths a wish not to be hurt by the feeling that you have given pain.

So much for that; but as for Maymyo it lulls

one as with the cooing of innumerable doves. I used to sit of a morning on the verandah of the Club, with the blaze of the yellow creeper above me and the crisp sunlight dappling the broad spaces of the view, and I used to feel that life was good. The senses basked in that prelude to the day, and the adorable earth, tingling and hushed, seemed to await her conqueror as a woman awaits the call of her lover. A far-fetched simile no doubt, but it *is* true that without some human analogy the face of nature is often menacing in its loveliness, as though we were to perceive beneath her smile the relentless enmity of her heart. I find oppression in sheer beauty, which has its treacherous basis in the hopes and passions of mankind, but Maymyo is soothing rather than beautiful. There is cunning in her simplicity. She makes one feel, if I may so put it, how reasonable life is. Of course everybody thinks that he, himself, is a pattern of reasonableness, which I daresay is the truth if only people wouldn't use the wrong keys to force the lock of personality, but here one had the feeling that not only oneself, but existence also, was reasonable. It is as though all were understood in the sudden comprehension of that amazing phrase, " The truth

shall make you free." And that is not a usual state. No, life usually wears the countenance of a cheat. Why should men be enormously successful whose only capacity is the capacity for making money, why should people agree so readily on fundamentals and disagree so hopelessly on their application, why should human nature be capable of magnanimous intentions but almost incapable of carrying them through? Yet I think that most of these paradoxes are due to our misuse of words, like the man who argues that there is no such thing as self-sacrifice because no one does anything unless he wants to do it. The miracle of Maymyo—to return for one short moment to my subject—is that it brushes from the mind all such obscure questionings. One lapses into a primitive and profound acceptance. If we could only always carry a Maymyo with us in our inmost heart!

These generalizations are harmless, I assume, but I scarcely suppose they will illumine Maymyo. Is it necessary that they should? In meticulous descriptions there is often a sort of mendacity; they give facts with one hand, they take away life with the other. I could speak of the wooded seclusion of the villas, where the breath of the

encroaching wild is hot upon man's feeble trail, of the military society bound by its traditional code, of the chill nights, whose comeliness, as one descends from the train, is broken by the clamour of gharri-wallahs, but that, again, is only the surface. Things are as they are ; it is something in ourselves that creates the precious out of the ordinary and makes seductive the reveries of our imagination.

It is so. When I sat there in the quiet sunlight without a care a beautiful world sang low to me in unison. Sealed up were those deep pits of the mind that lie ready for the traveller of his own thoughts. All the irritability of my nature, which often concentrates dumbly upon those I most care for (there are only two or three people I really hate), seemed washed from my sinful heart. I revelled in the solitude and in the feeling of forgotten isolation. How one encourages such an emotion with one's conscious fancies, fixing them on subjects which you are certain nobody else in the whole earth is then considering, on some totally obscure theological work written eighty years ago by a Spanish priest, on the remembered sight of a coarse-looking man in a London street seized with sudden com-

passion and stealing back from his companion to press a coin into a beggar's hand, on what thoughts perchance Clive had as India spread before him for the first time. Sitting there, I didn't want to read. There are occasions when reading is almost repulsive to me, when the realization that the author is dead will make what he has written all-meaningless, as though the virtue had gone out of it. Ah, these flood-time hours when books are trivial through the mere fulness of life !

The need to drive if you have to go two yards, and the longing to have everything done for you by a fawning Madrasi Christian who says " Yes " and " No " in the same breath, and whose " Very good, Sahib," is gravely to be mistrusted the more assured it sounds, deserts you (more or less) in Maymyo, and you positively begin to think of independence and country walks. Deep rides part the woods, and a road borders the lake beyond the polo-ground. The birds of the forest may be seen though the animals remain hidden, and the screech of green parroquets, flying off in a perpetual state of alarm, is but one reminder that the East here meets the West. The tangled scrub is dense with the promise of a wilderness and empty with

the fruition of its own death. Big game prefers the more open country of the lower ranges and jungle-fowl and peacock haunt the neighbourhood of wood-bound paddy-fields. Early morning and the hour before dusk are the times for walking. The mornings have the frosty nip of a perfect autumn, and in the late afternoon the first cool of coming night spreads sweetly over the earth. The middle of the day is hot without being sultry, and the slumber of the vanished tropics has settled upon the woods. Night sinks rapidly in Maymyo ; there is no afterglow (for the hills are beneath you) and the stars are mustering with the stir of the evening breeze. Fires burn in the grates, men hasten towards the bar, and here, as elsewhere in the East, dancing fills up the gap before dinner.

I can never leave a place where I have been happy without creating in my mind, not alone the hope, but the intention to return. It completes the circle, and though naturally I seldom do return, that intention carries me over the first few weeks of regret. Thus, of course, I made elaborate and genuine promises to come back to the hills, and I particularly deplore my failure to redeem them.

The pleasures of Maymyo were not such as to wane, and its inhabitants, the few that I was friendly with, were not such as to weary. It would be nice to say something about them here, but while novelists may enlarge, travellers must contract. Though one may, I believe, commit some social indiscretions and be forgiven, there is no forgiveness for the man who is perfidious in the pursuit of reality. Society is too close a corporation for that. After all, we may talk and talk, but people are the crux of every situation, for even if you don't know them they touch you with their invisible fingers. They are the intimate enigma of every life. All things live in our eyes, all things die in our hearts. But I cannot bring myself to fill out the portraits. The obscure reactions which spell happiness or discontent must remain concealed in words describing the state of one's own self before the varied scenes of the globe and the hurried recollections of the fleeting years. A pen-picture is little, an odd recorded conversation is less, personality is the thing. It is the real problem. I remember once being in a room full of flies all exactly alike, and with what horrified fascination I watched one that had a speck of sugar sticking to its legs—it

suggested the lurking personality of them all. I hated the thought that each of those flies had its life to lead ; I wanted them to be automata. . . . It is not thus we wish to regard men and women ; and that is why crowds are depressing and individuals are satisfying.

I seem to be evading my subject with success, but though that is a bad habit of mine, it is, perhaps, more forgivable here than elsewhere, Maymyo really did fill me with a host of vague ideas ; it was, at once, a stimulus and an opiate. I felt as if I were living in a vacuum beyond which I could hear faintly the roaring of a tide. Life stood still, and simmering with quiet happiness I awaited the oncome of its evils and its joys. Such a pause is not the greatest thing you can ask of existence, for that only reaches one in ecstatic moments of harmony in the rush of experience, but it is great enough. Why then should I not now re-create the spirit of those days ? The written autobiography of any life is too much the record of exceptions. What we really want to know is what a man did when he was doing nothing, not what he did when he called on the Emperor Menelik or found a cobra under his pillow. And that, apparently, is what

we are fated never to know, probably because nobody knows it himself. The mask that we put on for others becomes habitual even in the privacy of isolation. (I sometimes wonder whether that is why theatrical photographs always look unreal.) Moreover, writing about a place naturally consists in writing about all sorts of things. Statistics and history have an importance usually, but I question whether they have here, and at any rate I am ignorant of them. Description is necessary, and I have tried to give a little; people are intensely necessary, and I have tried to give nothing. And what is more, I have succeeded. Is that really solely discretion and good feeling, or is there a hint of laziness or inability? It doesn't matter much. As for ideas—well, what of them? Ideas are common enough. Too common. They are about us in the very air, weaving their feelers into the structure of our moods. Most people have a different side for every different friend, and most people, too, in an even more intangible way, have a different side for every different place. This is my Maymyo side, so let me at least give rein to the insubstantial musings that the special personality of Maymyo conjured up.

THE IRRAWADDY

The antiquity of rivers in their unwearied service to man and the thought of their constant life amidst the change and mortality of the generations give them a place in human interests and affections which the sea alone excites. In the fable and fact of history the story of the great streams unfolds like the winding course of their waters, and it is thrilling to behold, fresh as in the dawn of things, the very rivers that Alexander crossed and Cortez ascended. They do have a sort of anthropomorphic appeal. It is as if the dryads of the streams were not dead like the fauns of the woods, it is as if an emerging identity survived in the ripple of brooks and in the roar of torrents.

These few words will not, I trust, sound out of place as an introduction to the Irrawaddy, for that river, in its navigable thousand odd miles, brings curiously to the mind not one personality

but three—the delta stream from Rangoon to Prome, the dry-zone stream from Prome to Mandalay, the forest stream from Mandalay to Bhamo. The first of these I don't know save from hearsay and from some knowledge of the delta itself, but I picture it clearly, a broad and placid stream flowing through endless paddy-fields with deliberate slow curves, a stream full of traffic but dull as a ditch save for that wonderful sight of the carved Buddhas on Gautama Hill. The second reach of the river I do know in a sense. I know its frowsy villages, Thayetmyo, Pakokku and the rest, ankle-deep in dust and stifled in boredom; I know its brown landing-banks alive with staring eyes and piled high with bags of ground-nuts; I know the mysterious vista of dead Pagan and the ugly oil-wells of Yenangyoung. And knowing it thus cursorily, I desire to know it no more. In fact, of all these long miles, perhaps the most restful sight is the approach southward to Prome in the late afternoon, with the contrast between the desolate timbered hills on the further shore and the buildings and bustle of the old city. Yes, taken all in all it's an uninteresting journey, and were it not for the actual comfort of the I.F.C.

steamers and the varied life that is about you on the third-class deck and on the towed flats, one would miss nothing by missing the experience. But that life is Burma in little. The Burmese love to travel on their river. They compose themselves in huddled rows till the whole large deck resembles a tropic bean-feast. They squat down contentedly with their bundles and their merchandise, with their food and their cooking-stoves, in a fantastic medley of gay colours. They talk, they sleep, and the subdued hush of that drowsy life passes over the ship sweltering down the Irrawaddy beneath her awnings. The smell of the tethered cattle in the flats, going to the delta for the rice-harvest, mingles with the smell of curries and fruits, and chickens and dogs pick their way amidst the recumbent passengers.

Indeed, when one comes to think of it, this part of the voyage does appear to have been spent mostly in sleep. I sat at table beside a nice couple who had been wandering all over the world, missing nothing, and who had austere views of a traveller's duty. The lady, in particular, was indignant at my capacity for slumber.

"Are you going to write about Burma?" she asked me.

"Well, perhaps," I replied.

"Mark my words, it'll be the greatest humbug," she answered in a decided voice. "Here you are sleeping all the time. I shan't buy a copy of your book. I never heard of such nonsense."

"Never mind," I interrupted, "there are books and books. Now don't take it personally or be annoyed, but I really am getting terribly sleepy. You know I always sleep in the afternoon."

"Yes," she observed in a final thrust, "you always sleep in the afternoon and you always sleep in the morning. You never do anything else."

Still, we remained capital friends, and her husband and I used to take an occasional smothered stroll when the steamer stopped at some calling-place or other of that sun-baked land.

This is all very discouraging, I fear, but then it is not till you leave Mandalay behind and begin to beat up towards the Chinese frontier that the real glory of the river is revealed. In those solitudes, with the forest hanging on either bank and the clear sky reflecting the shoals in the smooth water, the steamer feels her way, following

carefully the buoyed and shifting passage and startling the divers and the wild-fowl. In the immense silence spreading over the land the beat of the paddles sounds loud and trivial. It arouses the echoes only to swallow them unconcernedly in its stillness. It is sentient, it ponders upon the dark enigma of its heart ; and the serried hills, wooded to their summits, appear to gaze upon the river as a sombre animal might gaze upon a dancing fly. The scenery has the grandeur and oppression of the wilderness. The insignificant traces of man's toil are lost upon this virgin world, and the engulfing jungle, relentless and seething, feeds upon decay and turns all into an inextricable riot of life and death.

It was from Mandalay that I first took steamer on the Irrawaddy. The hour was late when I left the Fort to drive the three miles down to the shore, and the dwindling town grew darker and darker as I approached the river. I had plunged out of lighted Europe in the U.B.C. into the very arms of old Asia. I could see in the gloom the outline of several moored steamers lying beneath me, and wading through the thick dust and down the sandy bank, I found my boat at last and went on board. The clamour of the day had long

since ended and the river slumbered. I had a feeling of guilt, like an illicit disturber of the short tropic night, as I crept down the line of cabins searching for my name. But with the first gleam of day the river was alive, and by the time I had dressed we had cast off from the shore and were toiling upstream against the sluggish current. The air was fresh, and Mandalay behind us, shrivelling by inches, seemed infinitely remote from the vigorous real world of the river's morning.

There are few settlements along the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy and most of them are small. Thabeitkin, the station for the ruby mines at Mogok, sixty-one miles distant, Katha, where a branch of the railway runs, and Shewgu, where they make a superior terra-cotta earthenware, are, perhaps, the most important this side of Bhamo; but, after all, what are they but scratches? Upper Burma lies in her primeval peace and her forests awake only to the occasional sound of the teak-cutters. One talks about the romance of commerce (at least, I believe so), but I wonder how many people realize precisely what the collection of teak entails, the hardships and solitariness of the life, the damp silence of fever-

stricken forests, the weary district marches year in and year out, the appalling ennui. The teak logs lie in the narrow streams, each with its firm's mark on it, till the rains sweep them to the Irrawaddy. There they are lashed together into huge rafts, which, with a hut, a flagstaff, and five Burmans on board, float slowly downwards towards the mouth. One passes many such rafts, and in their capacity for getting broadside on the progress of the steamer is often hindered by their unwieldy bulk. In the loneliness of the river, weighing upon the spirit with a sense of one's own ant-like unimportance, the sight of these rafts with their story of the mapped jungle is invigorating. They steal along like adventurers who have run a gauntlet of imminent peril and are returning home with untold treasure. The settlements are no more than pin-pricks, but these rafts bear with them a message of victory, of how man, in that ominous land, has faced and circumvented the power of nature. We pay the price ; the body of many a white boy, not long out from home, has rotted undiscovered in the dismal fastnesses of the teak.

Steamers do not navigate the Irrawaddy by night, though they carry searchlights in order to

make their landing-places. They tie up alongside the shore and with the stoppage of the engines one is conscious of the extraordinary night-silence of the jungle. It broods upon the river, enormous and deep as the spaces of the starry sky above. The vanished world sleeps from crowned hill-top to dripping river-stone, and the voice of its breathing is vast and soft. The strange cries that break it spasmodically have the wandering quality of spirits calling as they pass, and the honk of the wild geese moving to their feeding-grounds is as the voice of sorrow wailing overhead. Such occasional noises heighten the illusion of profound silence and give to all the quickened night an air of formidable tension. But man, who secretly fears and despises nature, rebels in his heart against the domination of the wilderness. The light gossip of cities echoes within the saloon of the steamer floating on the black and tremulous water, and, instead of allowing himself to be overwhelmed by the majesty of the night, man makes it resound again to clinking glasses and raised voices. This is, in essence, a normal and proper reaction, and one ought really, if one thinks of it, to encourage frivolity in the wastes.

LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY ONTARIO

I remember spending at Katha just such a night as I have described above, when, in the murk, with the forest stretching around that bare and shabby settlement, straining on it, breathing on it, I and some others started from the steamer to attend the performance of an itinerant circus. It was really very grotesque. We struggled over a mile of dust, between forlorn shanties and back-yards, and reached the gaudy circus-tent, inside of which a miscellaneous crowd was gathered, as though drawn out of their forest-holes by some Pied Piper of the jungle. That Indian circus aped, to the very clowns, the circuses of my youth. I have not seen a more remarkable tribute to Britain's hold upon the East—though, of course, for all I know we may have taken clowns, as we have taken curry, from Asia. I sat there slightly benumbed; it was simply too impossible. Without, the night of the wilds continued to mutter in its sleep.

I mentioned how it was not alone, but with companions, that I attended the Katha circus, and it is entertaining for me to recall the variety of people I travelled with from Mandalay to Bhamo and from Bhamo down to Prome. One must practise either a special aloofness or a special

ease on these cooped steamers, but as, in a general way, Europeans use them for relaxation rather than business, the wish to be amiable is well diffused. The happy-party atmosphere draws all together, the honeymoon couple, the tired engineer from Rangoon, the American oil-driller with his perpetual "Wall, this is the idee," the man like a Cambridge don who is arranging the census and discusses music, the major on a tour of inspection, the young officers of the ship with their realistic talk and sentimental love of banjo melodies, the robust missionary who looks at you as if he knew something about you not at all to your credit, the fever-stricken youths down on leave from the jungle. For a few short days we were thrown closely together, and I rescue now their fleeting figures out of that oblivion I have passed into with them.

No, you can't escape your companions on an Irrawaddy steamer, the construction of all of which, whether large or small, seems to be exactly the same. The first-class accommodation is shut off entirely from the rest of the vessel ; it consists of one long saloon, with cabins opening out on either side and a table down the centre, a saloon which bulges at the end, where the cabins cease,

into a sort of drawing-room with easy-chairs. Then, through sliding doors, you come to the bow of the ship, the observation-post from which the expanse of the river opens before you. A cramped life, you will admit, in which one might surely be excused for sleeping too much.

Enthusiasts point to the Second Defile, some twelve miles below Bhamo, as the most striking scene on the Irrawaddy, but I doubt their verdict. It is regal, I admit, with its towering rocks hung above the shadowed stream, with its chill breath, and its touch of doom, but it is a regality that leaves too little to the imagination. The mind is so constructed that it must finish such symphonies for itself; it wants to catch the last dying notes only within its inward ear. The Second Defile tells its story too completely for romance. Its very beauty has a cloying taste. For myself I prefer spots upon the river heralded by no fame, mists floating off from pink estuaries in the dawn, grass banks where the pea-fowl strut in the afternoon. But why cavil? This river, with its double rising in far Thibet and in China, has a dumbfounding quality about it that gives it rightful place amongst the wonders of the Eastern world.

NEAR THE CHINESE FRONTIER

The crowing of innumerable cocks floated over the shrouded water as dawn began to struggle through the mists of the winter Irrawaddy. I got up, shivering a little, and looked through my port-hole upon Bhamo rising like a ghost before me. Extraordinarily subject as I am to the suggestion of places, I seemed to feel the very breath of China in the air, to sense it in the dim houses and in the shadowy figures hurrying to and from the ship. Burma was over and done with; through the forest-reaches of the great stream, silent in the desolation of the wilderness, we had pierced to another land, to another race, to another civilization. Below me wisps of fog were drifting over the water, and a muffled stillness, deeper and denser than the vast quiet of a night upon the river, hung in the blind twilight of the slowly widening day. My first

impulse was to dress forthwith and wander out, but my second was to sit awhile on my bed and taste in secret the flavour of my expectation. It is at such moments, always rare, and rarer as life goes on, that an exquisite feeling of well-being, harmonious as first love or as music heard in dreams, fills and overpowers me with a Dionysian joy. It is good to pass these moments alone.

When I did emerge the fog had so far lifted as to show me clearly enough a steep path that led straight to a huge caravan camp, full of tethered ponies and Yunanese in their loose blue, with bales of merchandise upon the ground, and Chinese saddles heaped up about the fires. My imagination had not failed me ; in the half-light of the dawn the scene had the symbolic intensity of a revelation. This land, which had belonged to China till the middle eighties of last century, was yet Chinese in all but name. Beyond the hills, but twenty-eight miles distant and visible before I left, lay China herself, sloping down to her plains, unknown and unknowable in her strange and ancient vitality. I went on up the bank, and turning sharp to the left came to a street—it was called China Street—where the roofs of the houses curled upwards and Chinese

sat in dark doorways. But again I was seized with that desire to ponder in privacy the idea of a new world, which was the old, old world of the Far East, and wheeling suddenly I returned to the steamer. It was lucky for me that I did so, for I found awaiting me there the Bhamo agent of the I.F.C., a man replete with stored knowledge, who illumined for me later in one sentence something about Bhamo I had instinctively felt since the first moment. "On the frontier," said he, "we live on rumours." I had been feeling about in my own mind for just such a phrase to account for the odd, exciting atmosphere of the town, which, with its mixture of races, its caravans that come and go, its air of secrets and of waiting, has yet nothing in it of the deadly cosmopolitanism of many famous cities.

We were, I remember, driving along that very road which, followed for two months on mule-back, would bring you direct to Pekin, when he spoke these words. I looked sharply at him, sitting there beside me in calm security, and suddenly I seemed to hear around me the whisper of innumerable hills, passing on, one to another, the restless murmurs of men's hearts. Near now in the blue morning were the frontier posts;

thence toiled the laden mules and ponies, carrying with them not alone the traffic of two empires, but never-ending mutters of political upheaval and tribal discontent. Bhamo is the sounding-board of that long, wild frontier, where the Province tails away into northern spaces whose subserviency to British rule is hardly more than nominal. The simple peons, with their Oriental acceptance of rumour, reflect rather than create the sense of expectancy that tingles along the outposts and gives to Bhamo a real atmosphere of romance amid the dreary precision of modern governmental procedure. Before the morning was fully awake, and while my thoughts were still groping towards the word of solution, we went to examine the old Chinese joss-house, whose quiet courts, opening one into another, lead finally to the figure of Kwanyin, Mother of Mercy, one of the Buddhist hierarchy who lend their aid to men in the slow advancement out of sorrow towards Nirvana. In its various portions this building dates from three hundred and fifty to two hundred years back, and, ornate though it be with the bizarre decoration and adornment of the Chinese, it is singular to note the blending dignity of the whole, and to compare it with the crude barbarism

of Burmese art, so similar and yet so different. A tottering caretaker, going on in front, lit in our honour pungent incense before two of the shrines, and the monastic peace of the courts was filled with the fragrance of his offering.

It was with reluctant steps that I quitted this joss-house, half-temple and half-theatre and altogether delightful in its seclusion. In there renunciation of the world's desires might fall naturally as dew upon the soul. Buddhism, as a creed, has avoided the harsh cleavages of the ascetic; it endeavours, you might almost say, to mould the character along the lines of least resistance. Thus it has an appeal to the West which Mohammedanism, for instance, will never have, and more especially as its reasonableness is based upon mysticism. It gives men, in its purity, a religion divorced from dogma but not divorced from the spiritual. But what is the use of attempting to summarize in a few vague phrases the philosophy of a thousand works? I strolled towards the market, amidst whose patch-work stalls I soon made the discovery that this side of the river, where not Chinese, is mainly Shan. I missed the prettiness, laughing and languishing at once, of the true Burmese types. The bazaar displayed,

in all their variety, the commodities of the races of Bhamo. Cheap goods from England were jumbled up with their Cantonese equivalents, here were Junnan walnuts and pears, and here were the ceremonial garments of the Shans in red and silver. Not only is there much trade between China and Burma—fine silks and tiny ingots of gold coming in over the mountains, raw cotton and jade passing into the Land of the Southern Cloud—but there is a constant traffic from the river-settlements and an incessant flow from far-off valleys, which, carried from the forlorn tracts of little-known tribes, is represented in Bhamo by queer and valuable assortments. Who can visualize the marches, the labours, and the perils brought to triumphant conclusion in the crooked streets of this small town of 9000 inhabitants? Bhamo is, in its outlet to the world, the meeting-ground of trade as well as of politics. Steamship and mule-pack bring here the treasures of the continents, shuffle them, and move them on. There is a famous shop in Bhamo, Kohn's store, where you can examine for yourself what the frontier provides and the tourist covets, from mounted leopard skins to amber beads, from ivory opium-pipes to hammered

brass, from mauve Kachin jade to Shan bags fringed with bells ; but, after all, you can see such things just as readily in Rangoon. Souvenir-hunting on the outskirts of the world is a charming occupation, but it is not a very cheap one. I suspect that there are better bargains to be obtained in London than in Bhamo. In any case, the rarest curiosity in Bhamo is Bhamo itself.

No, it is not in contemplation of other people's labours that the conquering instinct gains its final satisfaction. That is what I felt very strongly amidst the gathered profusion of that curiosity shop. Just as a score of music may be studied as a book, but only reveals itself ultimately as sound, so is travel, itself, the only answer to the wanderlust, in spite of the efforts of collectors and the ever-growing literature of places. I expect it is not a very logical emotion, this craving to have viewed places for oneself, but that certainly would not damn it in my eyes. There are some people who want to collect objects, and there are some people who want to collect impressions, and then, again, there are a great many people who don't want to collect anything. You may dogmatize on taste, you cannot dogmatize on tastes. I love travelling, but the tragedy of all these visits

to the edge of beyond is that they are only to the edge. It is the beyond that is calling you. A week in Bhamo, a month, a year, ten years, ah, then, maybe, one would begin to know something.

I left Kohn's store feeling more than ever the need of time. The world had begun to shine about me, and in that broadening light my imagination, too, as though inflated by the day, began to soar out over hidden China. My companion told me how, when you got to the hills, the panorama stretched beneath you in all the quaintness of a wood-block print. Yunnan, far removed from the centre of Federal Government, is yet the China of Marco Polo beneath the filtering forms of new ideas. Still are the rivers crossed by sloping bridges, still do the roofs curve at the corners, still do the people hold fast to the modes of their ancestors. I seemed to see it all, as if I stood upon the heights with a telescope to my eye ; I seemed to see the green, flat fields, the toiling peasants, the neat formalism of stone carving, and the brown shapelessness of mud huts. And I felt it more powerfully even than I saw it. It was the definite spirit of old China, sane and complete, with nothing in it of that muddled

mentality of the frontier tribes. Because China is different from us she appears eccentric, but perhaps there is something in that imperturbability which the West can't learn simply because she is not the East. There is a sort of wisdom embedded in character, and it is possible that the possession of one kind means, of necessity, the lacking of another. Wisdom, in brief, bears often very little relation to knowledge. Moreover, you may be outwardly eccentric and inwardly sane, and you may be outwardly sane and inwardly mad. I am reminded of Dostoievsky, who, externally abnormal, is really sane because he accepts life, in contradiction to Tolstoy, who, externally healthy (I am talking of their novels), is really insane because, deep within him, he rejects life. These analogies!

In the kaleidoscopic effect of swiftly-changing glimpses seen again through the thronged memory of crowded minutes I can hardly avoid shaping this chapter into a mixture of catalogue and generalization. It must just take its chance. We hurried from spot to spot, and as we hurried we talked, or, rather, my host answered the questions I showered on him out of my mingled ignorance and curiosity. The more I saw of Bhamo, the

more I lamented my lack of preparation. Pictures often leave an indelible mark, but a correct understanding of nations must be founded upon applied psychology. No doubt there is a kind of spell which knowledge may only dissipate, but has it any validity beyond interpreting to oneself one's own peculiarities? I wonder, and I wondered then, as, afloat once more upon the winding river, Bhamo faded behind me under the sentinel-watch of its hills, and the jungle, pressing upon the banks of the Irrawaddy, seemed yet to await in patience "the passing away of a fantastic invasion."

PENANG AND SINGAPORE

The coast of southern Burma and of Siam is studded with a thousand islands lying in dreamy loneliness upon that sheltered sea. While the steamer passes down towards the Federated Malay States they rise and fade about you, and in the drooping heat they appear phantom-like, floating on the water, ready to vanish in the drowse of the afternoon. Their peace is undisturbed; in the endless summer of their life they sleep in wooded quiet, with the unrest of the deep waters on one side and the treachery of the firm land upon the other. An enchanted calm holds them in its grip, and the traveller, watching them from the deck in their dim procession, feels creeping upon him the drugged air of their repose. The Mergui is a mysterious archipelago, poisoned in its very softness, stagnant in the lull of its hushed existence. And beyond the islands, as the steamer moves southward on her course, the mountains

of Siam come out at last clear against the sky, breaking irrevocably the subtler spell of that unearthly paradise.

Penang is reached within four days of leaving Rangoon, and you need give it but one glance to know that you are in a very different place from Burma. With all its colour, there is something heavy about Burma, something exhausted and sombre, but Penang has the brilliance of the southern seas. It glistens, and the great hill beyond the town, wreathed in its morning clouds, serves only as deep contrast to the bright gaiety of the scene. I felt a light-heartedness as I landed which I had never felt in Burma. This was, indeed, the East freed from the dark sway of India. Pale dawn had risen upon another tropic shore ! The town bustled around me ; one sensed on every hand the gambler's easy come and easy go, and in the sheer meaninglessness of the Chinese shop-signs an exotic touch was added to the core of one's enjoyment. But, of course, there are many fallacies in impressionism, and I don't want to forget the danger of merely reading into the world the spirit of my own well-being. However, that is what I felt, and I put it on record.

The town is full of Celestials, and their stately

residences stretch out along the avenues and give to the place an appearance of fixed prosperity. Chinese have an unaffected hankering after display. They love palaces, though they may, perhaps, only inhabit one room of them, and their adoration of the substance of wealth amounts almost to an intellectual idea. Childish without being simple, they have their own values, which, European on the surface, are not really European at all.

It was a dazzling morning. Clerks hurried by in rickshaws, and bespectacled merchants, benevolent and non-committal, peered at one incuriously, leaning back in their cars. I love to set foot in a new country and to feel its strange atmosphere. The inhabitants stare at you, and they don't see you, or at most they think, "Another ship must be in." You are not one of them, you who have come out of the West with your curiosity, and now is your only chance to obtain that unique thing, the observation of the uninitiated. For the routine of absorption soon begins and it is absolute. You will know more later, but you will never see places again as you see them at the first moment. However, I have said all this before in so many words.

I had for some hours in Penang the companionship of an American girl off the boat, who was returning home by herself from the interior of Turkey, and who had to the full that singular American faculty of appearing surprised at nothing, while being insatiably curious about everything. A nice girl with a plain Irish face and bird-like eyes. We motored out together the three miles to the Waterfall Gardens, spread incomparably about the green cup of forest-clad hills. Monkeys swung and chattered in the trees, diving deeper into the woods as we approached, and the winding road opened out cramped view on view in the rare seclusion of glade and slope. The finest gardens of their kind I have ever seen. And the American girl talked; she prattled with delightful inconsequence, she kept telling me stories of boarding-house life on the Pacific Coast more weird in their kind of familiar impossibility than the deeds of Cooper's Red Indians. Her voice had the refreshment of a cool drink amidst these solitudes. But we began to get hungry after a time, so turned the car round and hastened to the Runnymede for tiffin. It was not one of those friendships that destroy appetite, and when, later in

the afternoon, I saw her off from the quay to rejoin her ship, I did so without even the hollow sigh of the renouncing Gibbon.

I retraced my steps to the hotel and sat down once more upon the balustrade of its gardens, which face the sea, with a view of a curving, palm-crowded coast and of straggling isles. The breeze puffed in languidly, and the plash of the little waves kept throwing along the beach the refuse of a tropic shore. Twilight fell, and in the gathering gloom an outward-bound steamer, with her air of secrecy and adventure, stole beyond the point, where the reflection of the vanished sun held all the ebbing day in a luminous and dying clutch.

But with darkness came the need for me to catch my train. On Penang (the town itself is called George Town, though you would never guess it), catching your train means a half-hour's run in a ferry-boat. Yes, Penang, like Singapore, is an island ; these two, with the strip of Province Wellesley behind Penang, with moribund Malacca and the dead Dindings, and with some scattered isles, such as Labuan, compose the Straits Settlements, the mantle of whose greatness overshadows all Malaya, justifying through their hold

upon the Far Eastern route their importance in the scheme of Empire. Under the sizzling lights the ferry-boat was crowding up with all the Orientals of one's choicest fancy. They talked ceaselessly, they elbowed one another, they sat about mournful or faintly smiling, and some of them were not above expectorating rather too freely. Away went the boat at length, and vividly gleamed riding lights, town lights, harbour lights. Penang was falling astern. It had not disappointed me, save in so far as nothing comes up to expectation after a certain age, and its very name can still bring back to me, with that power names have of evoking images, the dyed colours of the East and the smell of spices.

I say it had not disappointed me, and I say it all the more strongly with the memory of another evening spent in Penang harbour four months later. As I stood there, leaning over the rail of the steamer, taking my last look at Malaya, the whole harbour was magically, as at a given signal, transfused in coral, and the sky between its coloured clouds shone green in the cavernous east. A marvellous effect of light, which in the swift fading of the day gave to the mountains, the forests, and the town the aspect of one vast statue

carved against the outline of the heavens. The solidity of the earth, between the flushed water and the melting sky, was terrific as graven metal ; but even as I watched, the earth itself began to crumble into the night, the water to decompose, the sky to wither, while a few lamps shone out upon the sunken shore, a few big lamps ushering in a host of smaller ones, as the big stars usher in those of the lesser magnitudes. I turned away sadly from that portent of a relentless night devouring the very splendour of the world, closing so irretrievably another chapter of my wanderings. Nature herself, by one magnificent gesture of oblivion, had made the past into a dream, like a finished pageant fading before my eyes. But out of our dreams we sometimes create reality.

If I say that Penang did not disappoint me, I must couple to that, I'm afraid, the remark that Singapore, which for so many years I had joined with it in imagination in one sunlight picture, did. It belied the promise of its name, and that, in a sense, is my only excuse for writing about a place already so much written about and so well known. I used to sit in Kuala Lumpur—midway between the two, half a day by rail and ferry from either

island—and think to myself, "There's another and bigger Penang down there; it can wait a little." And yet my instinct was not quite at fault, for I did begin to have a sort of doubt before ever I saw it. It was an unformed doubt, but, in the uncreated words in which it arose, the image gradually altered. It became, somehow, more commonplace, it lost its gauzy hue. I don't know whether it was the talk of others or whether the near-by presence of a town can impress its personality on the intuition. I rather think it can, but, however, that is of small importance before the fact that Singapore is not a Penang. It has neither the inward nor the outward colour. It is heavy with commercialism, it hangs upon the sea like a drab giant, greedy and overfed. To find the charm of Singapore—for it has a charm of its own—you must consider it from another angle.

It was a fine morning on which I approached the island, though it threatened to begin unpleasantly for me on account of accusations of snoring—totally unfounded—brought by the other man in the compartment. However, it all ended up pleasantly over a cup of coffee and then a brandy-cocktail, and I daresay that many a friend-

ship has started like that from China to Peru. The ferry is only a matter of a few minutes over a bare two miles (they have already begun the construction of a causeway), but, once you are on the other side from Johore Bahru, there is still an hour's run in the train through hilly jungle which offers no kind of hint of the great town ahead. Singapore lives on its shipping; it thrives, so to speak, upon the brine of its harbour, but pales before the massy forests. Yet it has its compensations; it looks forth daily upon the ships of the world, and with its steady eye it gazes for ever upon the wandering populations of the sea. The bristling sight from the esplanade is, indeed, one to astonish an inhabitant of the interior, and the hotels of Singapore are eternally besieged by globe-trotters killing time with a distracted expression of haste. They leave a quaint cosmopolitan flavour on one issuing from the seclusion of Malaya, and I could not help watching them intently as though they were just going to order taxis to take them to Charing Cross.

To an even greater extent than Colombo or Hong Kong, Singapore is the focus-point of the East. From Australia, from the Dutch Indies,

from China, from India, from Europe, and from the African coast a perpetual stream of vessels comes and goes. It's the kind of place where you may constantly see dubious-looking people getting hurriedly off ships and simply disappearing into thin air. What schemes must have been hatched in Singapore, what ruffians and dreamers must have started thence carrying shabby bags and with their heads full of plots ! There really *is* something romantic about the great spaces of the East. You can breathe there, you can scheme there, you can disappear there.

Singapore, when I was in it, was in the throes of its first real modern spell of trade depression, and it was rather pathetic to observe its slightly bewildered air of forced optimism. On the surface things appeared much as usual ; its hotels were still crowded, from the Europe, Raffles, and Van Wyck downwards, its four thousand motor cars were still busy, its girls were still dancing, its streets were still seething, but beneath it all there was a creeping lassitude. The shipping, though immense, was not what it had been ; the godowns were full of raw goods it did not pay to export, and finished goods the up-country traders could not accept. The town, like a camel in the

desert, was living on its hump, was living on hope. Its huge fabric reminded one unironically of a whited sepulchre ; it is the product of trade and without trade it is a mere shell. Well, of course, not altogether, because its geographical position is its ultimate value, but to a large extent. Singapore was urgently in need of the reviving breath of industry.

It was curious how soon one became unconsciously aware of all these things, just as it was curious how, as I walked the streets of Singapore, I felt weighing upon me the vast islands of the Dutch East Indies, Borneo and Sumatra, that hem it on either side, and await, in turn, the development of their incalculable riches. These half-virgin islands, small continents in themselves, will be playing their part when Singapore has sunk to trivial unimportance through the cutting of the Siamese Canal. I do not say that that will be to-morrow ; I do not say that it will be in twenty years' time. But it will come. They have waited long, these islands, they can wait a little longer.

Of an evening, the European population of Singapore gives itself over to exercise, while rich Chinamen roll through the famous Gardens in

their cars, and contemplative strangers bask along the sea-front. As for the lowly native life, that goes on for ever unchanged, the bartering, the haggling, the odd burrow-like existence in narrow streets, the veiled existence of which we know, in any real sense, next to nothing. In the coolness of the short twilight you may recover again the charmed touch of the Orient. I often think that if nature affects man, man also affects nature, so responsive does she seem to our moods. The tremor at the heart of love gives a tremor to the whole visible earth, and the darkness of despair is reflected in her very frown. It is only time that goes by contraries, swift in happiness, slow in misery.

In the oncome of night, overwhelming with a rush the transient sunset of the tropics, Singapore suddenly assumes the mantle of the renowned East. The lights along the front answer the lights clustering on the sea, and a faint landward breeze stirs over the town and dies away back in the forests of Johore. All that was commonplace or strident has melted into a universal enchantment. The throb of the tropic night, like the murmur of a shell, sounds vaguely distant as though it were the whisper of an im-

material world lying hid within the rim of the world we know. It steals upon the air. The pervasive spirit of the East is reasserting itself. The disintegration of the day is forgotten: Singapore is now but one of a hundred darkened diademed cities of the Orient. In losing its own personality it gains the personality of the undivided East, of that East whose embroidered night is the very touchstone of illusion.

I know that in such a paper as this I am not tied down to precise information, but I do suppose that in the kind of atmosphere of places I wish to suggest there should be a more solid substratum than mere fancy. I look at what I have written and I wonder just how far it conveys any image. To me, yes, because I know the background, but to the reader? In novels based on reminiscence you will sometimes find a similar obscurity, where actions are not sufficiently explained because the author, in the very excess of his own knowledge of why things happened, forgets that his public cannot be equally intimate with the processes. And so with me: I see Penang and Singapore as I write, and I see them so vividly that I draw deductions which may possibly be unwarranted. The polished outline escapes me in an aerial

conception arising from the clash of an inanimate upon an animate personality. There it is; a method with drawbacks and, perhaps, advantages. I know it is easy to bring a charge of superficiality against it. One must remember that many respectable people, owners of assured incomes, "plain business men," consider that everything that is light and undocumented is superficial. Without justifying this chapter, or indeed, this work, I would observe that superficiality is not a question of method. It is a question of performance. And method and performance may be such different things; as far as that goes, these pages might be just as superficial if they were as full of statistics as a Blue-book. And so, if people argue that this chapter is shallow, or this whole book even, I daresay they will be quite right, but I daresay the reasons they will give will be quite wrong. That's to say, the kind of people I've got in my mind's eye.

LIFE IN KUALA LUMPUR

THE towns of Malaya suffer inevitably from the subdued personality of their recent creation. There is no revealing or aphoristic phrase to catch their spirit, as there are such phrases to catch the spirit of the old cities of India. Time has not yet shaken their elements into an indestructible cast; they are too amorphous, too unformed, to offer vivid angles of perception. To this general rule, Kuala Lumpur, notwithstanding its beautiful Lake Gardens, its stately Government Offices, and the crowded bustle of its streets, is no exception. It is alive, it is even attractive, but it lacks personality. Yet, just because it is so difficult to write about, it is perhaps all the more worth writing about. It presents a problem which no short cut can solve. It does not lend itself to contained pictorial treatment. I might describe how it winds about

its little hills and how a river, milk-brown from the silt of tin-workings, meanders through it and is responsible for its prosaic name of Kuala (mouth) Lumpur (mud), but many towns have their hills and rivers. That type of description is not at all illuminating. Kuala Lumpur, with its 70,000 inhabitants, capital of the State of Selangor and executive centre of the F.M.S. Government, gives one the impression of having developed in a blaze of good fortune. You see nothing in it of the tragic silence of history, nothing of the throes of supreme emotions. Its public edifices are dignified and architecturally reminiscent of both East and West, but as regards private houses utilitarianism has been the chief object. They are built for comfort, not for show, and the very native quarter is, in appearance at least, sadly hygienic. The guiding hand of a parental Government hovers over all.

Such observations are, no doubt, fragmentary, and I gather that a knowledge of, let us say, Pataling Street might modify my opinion in one respect. " It's the worst street in the Far East," a lady assured me, " worse than any in Singapore, or in Hong Kong, or in China, or anywhere." A comprehensive remark. Its dark jewellers' shops,

in which Chinese clerks are for ever making up accounts by the aid of an abacus, stocked with unmounted stones and jade, with gold bangles, and with rough Malay silver, have a barbarous, a florid attraction of their own. Perhaps as much as anything it's the attraction of contrast, and, indeed, the very spruceness of Kuala Lumpur, with its red laterite streets and its neatly planted American silk-trees, serves to heighten the fascination of the Oriental shops and eating-houses that open dimly from the ordered footpaths. Obviously there is a life going on here, a teeming life, that is but little guessed at by the self-centred nationalism of the European population, that, dividing its existence between business and pleasure with a sort of knife-like sharpness, is firmly resolved to re-create the atmosphere of home in the far-off Orient.

Shopping in these dens is amusing, but it is something more ; it brings the flavour of the East about you. How worked, where lived the craftsmen who beat this gold, who wove this silk ? That hidden world seems all the more impenetrable for the quaint trickle of its treasure. And how is one to gauge the very men behind the counter, suave Indian or still Chinee ? You pick

up an article with listless irrelevance, and you enquire the price and you put it down again ; ten minutes later you may buy it condescendingly at half the asked-for sum. It is all in the game—but who is the victor ?

I've allowed myself to get entangled in a description of Kuala Lumpur without explaining how I arrived there, which might be just as well in the circumstances. It was early morning when I stepped out of the train ; and, not having the faintest idea where my friends lived, I found myself wandering about a white, deserted, greenly encircled town in the quiet dawn, with the unshaven weariness of the night strong upon me. Not a propitious introduction, you may think, but never again did the town seem so charming to me as in those hours of its first, fresh strangeness. After all kinds of futile enquiries I discovered their place of business at last, and unpacking my deck-chair, lay back to rest in the outer hall, an exhausted Caliban, surrounded by my luggage. And as I lay there I slept, while the Eurasian clerks, arriving one by one, must have been gratified by the spectacle of a seedy-looking individual using their premises as a common lodging-house. Finally, my friends turned up.

Kuala Lumpur, or K.L., as it is commonly called, with that love of abbreviation you find throughout the East, apart from its veneer of British government and capital, is essentially a Chinese town. Malays are not much in evidence save as chauffeurs and syces, Japanese are being boycotted since their interference in China and are gradually leaving, and, though there are many Indians to be seen, a fair proportion of these hail from the surrounding plantations. It is Chinese life, in the main, that is about you in its stealthy unobtrusiveness and sedulous industry. The Chinese have been successful in Malaya, and it is a deserved success. They are the pioneer wealth-producers of this land. In Kuala Lumpur rich Chinamen are behind the scenes with their land deals and their mining ventures, well-off Chinamen keep stores, poorer Chinamen act as clerks, poor Chinamen are house-boys or rickshaw coolies. The grades of society are there, racial in some respects rather than social, but they are plastic. Fortunes come and go, as is inevitable with their gambling proclivities, and the coolie of to-day may be the towkay of next year.

As in so many tropic towns, the market is the real epitome of Kuala Lumpur's picturesqueness.

Here are piled up exotic fruits and vegetables, more enticing in their look than in their taste, here are great beehive baskets, from whose depths dismal quacks and cacklings issue evermore, here are heaps of fish and prawns and crabs, scenting the air, here are lumps of meat beloved of rich flies, and here are that general movement and excitement which characterize markets the world over. Near at hand, pigs, each in its wicker-work crate, lie prone upon the ground, pressing their quivering snouts through the bamboo bars. In the country you often pass piled wagon-loads of such crates being carted to the towns. The wretched animals resemble so many corpses in their flimsy coffins, and it's a form of cruelty that might well be done away with. But it won't be the Chinese who move in the matter, though you would think from their entranced gazes that a pig was their dearest friend. And so he is in a manner, but only from the point of view of succulence. You can't teach a Chinaman anything about pork, and even if tin and rubber were to collapse for good, pig-farming would still pay.

I wish I had it in me to allow the curiosity of my mind more freedom of action. All the months I was in this town I was constantly saying to

myself, " Now I will explore it from end to end," and naturally I never did. The case of Rangoon over again ! I can make all sorts of excuses, but I suppose the real truth is that I am one of those static travellers who often sit doing nothing when the world is at their feet. If I get the slightest glimpse of a thing, the least hint of a character, it opens out to me such a vista that I am almost content to let the reality slide. It's rather a sad confession, but then it is a confession, which is always something. It is often the unessentials (as understood) that strike me, and I remember how delighted I was when I discovered under the roof of the covered footpath of Market Street, near the Post Office end, a huge colony of house-martins' nests, plastering it all as with a brown rococo ceiling. It was April and the birds were nesting and were constantly sweeping in and out ; the whole air was alive with the criss-cross of pointed wings. I *was* pleased.

Like all Malayan towns, Kuala Lumpur is painfully expensive. And I fancy that beyond the usual reasons that govern economic conditions, some explanation of this may be found in the high value of what one may call the pocket unit of money, that's to say the dollar. The Straits

dollar, which is worth about 2s. 4d., is really not much more than the equivalent of the English shilling, and certainly not more than the equivalent of the Dutch guilder, worth 1s. 9d. throughout the Islands. Moreover, the tendency to spend is increased by the wasting appearance of the dollar notes, which look as insignificant as the old ten cent notes, in whose preservation sticking-paper plays a considerable part. You simply can't believe you are spending 2s. 4d., though as far as I am concerned I have a sort of idea it would make really no difference. However, all this is rather distressing.

Kuala Lumpur is a sociable spot and, as elsewhere in the tropics, the very minority of the British causes them to hang the closer together—at least, outwardly. In the mornings there is John Little's tea-room, where ladies from the town and the near-by estates endeavour to make the intervals of shopping congenial with the company of their friends; in the evening, of course, there is the Club. I don't mean the Lake Club, with all its famed selectness. I mean the Selangor Club, "The Spotted Dog," "The Dog." It occupies a foremost site in the town, facing the Government Offices across its green

padang, backed by a little knoll whose trees stand frilled against the sky, and its range of buildings, constructed on the model of the black and white timber houses of Tudor England, mingles convenience and ornament very pleasantly. I liked that club. They say it's a centre of scandalous gossip ; I daresay it is, but I'm not much impressed ; I never yet visited any club in the East that wasn't said to be the same. What can you expect when you put women in these unnatural surroundings ? Moreover, most of us suffer from the hope that everything is for the worst ; it's really quite praiseworthy and acts as a kind of social cement after the manner of the mutual spying of secret societies. I have nothing to complain of ; I met with kindness from its members, and not being obsessed by the charm of my own personality, I am proportionately grateful.

Of course, anybody coming to a place like Kuala Lumpur for no ostensible reason probably gets talked about. It isn't a health resort. I daresay I was often mistaken for an unsuccessful company promoter or a down-at-heel traveller in rubber-making machinery. It wouldn't alarm me. I have noticed that when people do discover

that I write now and then, I invariably get asked, " Oh, I hear that you're an author ; what name do you write under ? " To which I always reply sweetly, " I know it's odd, but, would you believe me, I write under my own." It's best to be frank, even to a double-edged compliment.

But at " The Dog " one day I had a rather different experience. A man came up to me and introducing himself (more or less) observed genially, " I've been wanting to meet you ; I'm told you're writing a novel about K.L."

" And who told you that ? " I replied, not wanting to break the flow of brightness.

" Oh, I heard it," he murmured vaguely ; and then, in a new voice, " By the way, I write novels, too."

" Yes ? " I followed up.

" Well, not exactly novels ; I write scenarios for films."

" And what happens to them ? " I asked unguardedly.

" Nothing so far ; the first one I wrote was declined, but I'm writing another. You need to know a lot about it. I studied it all up in London."

Having said this, he suddenly lost interest in

me and wandered off. But I don't assert that this is a typical conversation of the tropic East; it isn't.

Dances are a distinct feature of "The Dog's" life, and there is one every Saturday afternoon or night. The Selangor State Band plays, planters motor in with their wives, and the scene is animated. In the large reading-room, which, bared of its carpets, has had powdered chalk stamped into it by coolies, familiar couples perform their familiar steps, and on the balcony without, young men, either frightfully embarrassed or keenly conscious of their superior sex, are looking for partners. It was good to have this exercise in the languid Orient, it was also good to have a sponge-down afterwards. But then, again, it was just as good to watch the dancing and note how the slight exaltation of the hour will waft to the surface revealing bubbles in that treacherous pool that exists for ever where men and women meet. And, finally, perhaps it was best of all to intersperse society by solitude and walk out between whiles into the night. How thrilling the music of the waltz would sound, standing alone by the bridge two hundred yards away. At that distance it came to one soft as the melody of desire, it

echoed in one's heart with the very glamour of the ideal East. The town was hushed, the races of dark men were sleeping in their crowded lairs. A few lights shone scattered upon the hill, and a great star, as though stooping to listen, would hang low above the gilded outline of the Club.

Some one out here observed rather wittily (I daresay it is an old joke) that the call of the East is the call to the bar-boy, and the Selangor Club of an evening might often appear to justify this acid comment. But while there is a sort of club good-nature founded on drink, it's not the only basis of club kindliness. The spirit of reunion is always in the air, and if there may be much small talk of some malevolence there are certainly many small actions of genuine friendliness. It is a happy place for children, who, with their Malay ayahs and Chinese amahs, fill the building and the padang with their joyous shouts and brief tears. Poor little mites, how much of the East will they remember in after time ?

As long as you are white the Club draws few distinctions. To be a European is its passport—the title of " Spotted Dog " is growing obsolete —and within those limits it is a democratic institution. In that race-pure certificate it draws

a veil over the outer world and only the noiseless Chinese boys, immaculate in their ducks, serve to remind one of the desperate fact of exile. The chief endeavour is to forget that the East exists. It is the same attitude that we adopt towards death ; but we go on dying. The Club is quite self-contained, clique within clique, and, like the imprisoned aristocrats of the French Revolution, it pays little attention to departures, but marked interest in arrivals. Visual life is the only one that counts, but that, itself, must visualize the life of England. It is curious, and what is more curious still is to detect the differences of procedure and etiquette between one community in the East and another—as I mentioned before when I was writing about Burma. In my experience nobody in Burma talks about the F.M.S., and in the F.M.S. nobody talks about Burma. They are worlds apart, though only a few days distant by steamer. The British Empire of the East is a series of disconnected eyes all fixed on England.

Contact with your fellows is all very well, but there are hours when it is best to be alone. It is not only that man is a victim of moods, but that there is an ebb and flow inside our minds

corresponding to something in nature. I liked of a cool cloudy evening to take a solitary stroll about the winding roads of Kuala Lumpur's outskirts. The whole earth seemed different, subdued, faintly cryptic. It was as though she were laughing in her sleeve, resting content after the torture of the day. I don't quite know what people mean when they speak of communing with nature, but I do know that a companion at such an hour would almost inevitably have blunted one's appreciation of that opalescent change.

I have mentioned before that this is primarily a town of Chinese, and though I cannot pretend to any real knowledge of their private lives, yet there is one external point about them which is very noticeable, their love of processions. They will organize a procession on any possible occasion with an alacrity and whole-heartedness that suggest the gratification of a national need, and even in a funeral cortège the wailing of the bowed relatives behind the hearse is completely offset by the imposing banners and music of the hired mourners, not to mention the gorgeous appearance of the hearse itself. They love this sort of thing, and above all, they love fireworks, loud crackers, and resplendent rockets that fall in

golden showers or burst in balls of many colours upon the deep night-sky. But we must always recollect that the gaudiness of the East is the mask of an incomprehensible attitude and that it is about as easy to read a Chinaman's mind by the manifestations of it we observe as it is to decipher his ideographs by faith. And thought, after all, may be as national as language, and to some extent quite incommunicable.

I lived in a bungalow about three miles out of Kuala Lumpur along the Ampang Road, and it will not come amiss to describe that road as seen by me daily on my rickshaw journeys into the town. It was a road heavy with the sombre green of forests and sprinkled down its length with the houses of the out-pushing population. Where the trees met overhead you passed towards Kuala Lumpur through a sylvan archway splashed with sunlight, but in spite of this, in spite of the rickshaw boy in his blue dungarees and peaked straw-hat, the whole scene did not give one, somehow, the accepted idea of the East. But, then, most accepted ideas are faulty. The scene, however, was typical of Malaya, and made one perceive how trivial is man's boast of a vanquished jungle. Yes, that is a very vain boast, for even in cutting

down the jungle man becomes the slave of its ceaseless encroachments. In a smooth-running rickshaw, with a high-stepping boy, the drive was a pleasant one. Those coolies have a lollop like an undisturbed hare making for a hedge-gap in the twilight, and they seem able to keep it up indefinitely. I'm sure I don't know what one would do in Kuala Lumpur without rickshaws. Cars are not so very expensive to hire as it is, but if they had a virtual monopoly they would add another problem to the difficulty of making both ends meet.

The bungalow was a great place for mosquitoes, whose unerring pertinacity would discover the tiniest hole in a mosquito-net, and make of the long night an impossible burden. You had to tuck yourself in as a man tucks the blankets about him on a cold winter. And that necessary precaution increased the airlessness. You lay there, without even the covering of a sheet, encased in this four-square bridal veil, and the hushed hours rolled agonizingly over your perspiring body. The house-dogs, roused from uneasy sleep, would snuffle, whining about the passages, and occasional strange cries from without would be swallowed in the stillness they had themselves broken. I got

used to it, but some people can only sleep clasping a "Dutch wife," which promising accompaniment is the mere local name for a bolster. I don't know why it is, but so it is. Personally, I have never wished to clasp a bolster. The sight of the dawn was always good. Now and then I would get up early and walk to the race-course, and, sitting there on the fence, would watch my friends perambulate round and see the mists clear off the soaking hills. The talk was of horses and of more horses and of more horses yet; incidentally, the improper wiles of mankind would come in for mention. Then I would go back and drink tea and eat mangosteens and have a bath, flinging the water over me with a tin pail on to the runnelled stone floor. Eastern life has little variety.

Yes, it has little enough, and that is what makes the occasional race-meetings such an attraction. Everybody attends to watch their pet Australian griffins lose their money for them, though, as there are no bookmakers, but only the totalizator, there isn't the same noise as at a Rangoon meeting. Still, as I say, everybody attends, from the Rajah, with his wives and his yellow-umbrella bearer, to the lady who arrived last week from England with a wonderful frock

and a Parisian hat. If you are sitting on a bench talking with extreme decorum to another man's wife an unobtrusive Japanese photographer is certain to "snap" you, and next day the two of you will be in the window of his shop looking exactly as if you were making plans to fly to the Argentine together and leave the world behind. There will be great grief when the last Japanese has departed; those race-meeting photographs cause endless pleasure to your friends. Life in the East without a hint of scandal would be as intolerable as an evening at the Club without a few sukus. A suku is a miniature whisky and soda—the equivalent of a Burmese pau—and it was invented so that you might go on drinking indefinitely with your different acquaintances. In the same way with scandal: keep the ripple of it gently stirring, don't swallow a gulp and get really excited. That ends in anti-climax when the story is proved to be an invention.

I need hardly say that I haven't given all my experiences of Kuala Lumpur in these few pages; I might almost add, indeed, that I haven't given any. It was not my intention. I might enlarge for hours on all kinds of topics, from the maddening stupidity of house-boys, whose responsive

" Tuan, Tuan," bears, as often as not, no relationship to any kind of understanding (though one must admit that they have an astonishing ability to serve up a dinner for any number of persons at any hour of the night without any previous warning) to an intimate social description of life as the Europeans live it. But man is too overwhelming a problem for these simple pages. In the remembrance of innumerable personalities, of innumerable scenes, people must be either shadows in the background or giants sprawling across the page. Here they are shadows and even less than shadows. Of course, you may argue that it doesn't matter what you say, it's how you say it, but the question of likeness is bound to come uppermost. Tell the truth, but don't tell the whole truth ; it's the only wise system. I have my likes and dislikes, but that is a very private affair. (Most of us know how to conceal an icy dislike under a cloak of garrulous imbecility ; most of us know the stage when one simply ceases to bother to explain, contemptuously allowing false impressions to be made and mis-statements to be circulated. At least, I know both phases perfectly.) If one is going to study man in print then one should write novels, which are, or ought to be, the true works of

fact. I always smile when I hear people observe, "You know I don't read novels, I only read serious books," though I sympathize with them, too, when I think of the novels these people would read. But all this is decidedly extraneous. What I really want to say is that in a casual book of travels such as mine, the only personality likely to emerge is the personality of the author; and, need I remark, that may be exceedingly delusive. Oh yes! If I am called to account, I can but state that I have done what I meant to do, though I admit that I have not done it well. But that is a common discovery.

A RUBBER PLANTATION

THE bungalow lay in the very heart of the rubber —indeed, so far removed was it within the serried lines of trees that, approaching it along the track, one had the veritable sensation of approaching a witch's cottage within an enchanted wood. Especially was this so at night when the reflection of its lamps caught momentarily through the winding path seemed like the very echo of a fairy-tale in the still darkness of the vast plantation. The lights twinkled and beckoned with something of magic in their illusion of distance, and one could readily imagine a witch standing there at the door of her thatched and sloping cottage. Well, of course, there are witches and witches, which goes without saying, and the true interpretation of fairy-tales is but the true interpretation of life. The witch may turn into the good fairy and the good fairy into the king's

daughter. And what is the king's daughter but the sublimation of woman herself? This pretty allegory is only to say that if one expected to find a haggard witch in a straw-thatched hut, one found instead a beautiful lady in an atap-thatched bungalow. It was not a disappointment.

At night the bungalow wore an air of sombre dignity, standing in its small clearing, hemmed about by the encroaching trees, and with its shape outlined against the bluish tinge of the sky, but by day it looked forlorn as though lost to memory in the swift growth of the rubber, which stretched out on every side in long avenues of desolate neatness. One could observe the tappers move from tree to tree in the early morning, and far in the shade coolies would pass by and disappear. The bungalow began to awake. While it was yet twilight the master had left to superintend the muster of his section, and now the daughter of the house, aged two and a half, would march forth with her ayah, firmly stepping out in front with a white topie perched on her head. (She is, by the way, perhaps the only young lady of her age who has been heard to remark coolly: "Mummie, let's go to the Club to-night.") The house-boys would be stirring at the back, and the sound of

subdued talk, the eternal whispering of the East, would float through the netting of the mosquito-room like a signal for me to rise and contemplate no longer the rousing world from bed.

By nine o'clock the heat would be getting into its stride, all the blinds would be let down, and in the shadow of the dimmed bungalow, high above the ground, one could feel the eager pulsing of the sun. A great quiet descended on the earth; the tappers were collecting the latex in pails, and in the factory acetic acid was being added to the coagulating masses of the raw rubber. The invisible sun seemed to eat up one's energy as its rays drank up the pools of last night's rain. It was really cooler amongst the trees than under the roof, and walking away in any direction one would soon be lost to sight and could sit upon a stump and listen to the arid stillness of that ordered forest. There is something about a rubber plantation which reminds me of a modern prison; everything is clean, hygienic, and soulless. You don't see weeds, but you don't hear birds. The jungle has savage vitality, but here there is prim utilitarianism—Danton and Robespierre, shall we say? Romance is so much bound up with the idea of things alien to one's

own experience that people like to picture tropical plantations as a feast of exotic beauty. But they are wrong. In the lush sameness of tropical crops there is the weariness of eternal summer, and though rubber does " winter " and lose its leaves in a shower of autumn tints, there is nothing of autumn's spell within the air, nothing of its wildness in these carefully planted glades. The quiet around you is not that of the hushed English woods, it is the quiet of negation. You sit there and the very thoughts come frozen out of your heart. Mile upon mile of trees planted at set intervals, each with its tiny cup attached as though they were so many domestic pets, dull-looking trees, money-making trees, how could one expect to find the peace of true solitude within their shade ? At any rate, I couldn't find it ; perhaps I am fanciful, but they reminded me too much of company-meetings and of Aberdonians receiving dividend-warrants. Moreover, while I enjoy the formal artificiality of a garden, there is something ghastly in the thought of those artificial woods spreading over the land in uncounted square miles.

In May, when the seed-pods begin to pop and the monkeys swarm in to devour the kernels, there

is, no doubt, a more vivid touch of personality in the scene, but now in this vacuous quiet the personality is suppressed to nothingness. Not but what one conceives here, as elsewhere, a general sense of individuality, but that it sings so dreary a note to be dully inaudible. I have sat deep in the rubber, with the ants busy about my feet and the evening breeze beginning to stir in the upper branches, and I have felt within my very bones a sort of withering blight. Thought would be atrophied, but the casual sequence of memory would continue. (When the emotions have been blunted by a shock one still thinks clearly enough, one merely ceases to worry about one's thoughts.) As I sat there once amidst that dead monotony I recalled a dream I had had a few nights back, where, as in the crystal age of another world, I had felt a living monotony that would never pall. I dreamt that I was in a strange country with strange but friendly people ; the country seemed one immense plain, but all at once, as we walked, the sunlight was blotted out by fog and we reached a wall of rock that stretched indefinitely on either side and towered above us into the mist, which, feathery near the base, grew thicker and thicker until all above was

lost in whiteness. The rock was covered, as far as you could see, with a curly, green, moss-like plant, and I knew instinctively that this was the great mountain, shooting up thousands of feet in sheer plant-covered cliff, which no being had ever scaled and which was wreathed eternally in mist. And as I stood by the side of it, the volcano within the mountain rumbled and shook. Sometimes the sound would steal whispering along the edge, sometimes it would roar and laugh deep inside, and sometimes, incredibly high and remote, there came a blast as of compressed steam blowing off on the summit. You can form no idea of the sense of the monotony of that mountain and that plain, and no idea of how thrilling it seemed. Well, that was my simple dream, and I recount it merely as a contrast in sameness. I suppose that if my mountain represented anything, it represented my ever-present hope to find a corner of the universe that will not fall short of imagination. Is there such a one ?

The trees continued to sigh and the leaves to fall. It would be a relief to hear above that rustling mutter the sound of a rainstorm approaching over the forest. The pattering note would run along the trees in a rising crescendo, but so

local are these showers in Malaya that at times it would draw near only to die away, leaving the earth dripping a hundred yards distant and myself untouched.

On fine evenings life in the open would begin to grow tolerable towards sunset, and swarms of brown dragon-flies would hover over the clearing. In the level beams they quivered like great dust-motes, while the flying-ants, emerging from their holes, produced a flight of swallows to quarter the atmosphere and be gone as suddenly as they had appeared. It was remarkable how such days would brighten at their decline ; that's to say, not only the day itself, but everything that lives by the day. When the blinds were pulled up in the bungalow and the soft light flooded in and coffee was placed on the table, lassitude departed. I know very well the manifold details of an estate's recurrent labour that would seem to give the lie to my theory of an exhausted day rising into life only with the evening, but I suggest that energy may peel off one tired layer and reveal a fresh one. But however you may explain it, it is true that a wonderful lightness would spring up in the wake of the fierce defeated sun. This is the planter's hour ; he comes in weary, he has

his bath, and he emerges ready for anything. And at times there is a good deal to be ready for in the social gaiety of a hospitable community. Naturally.

The dusk would be drawing on. It draws on gradually in Malaya to pounce all at once, but even in that short space it can create the melancholy of the long northern twilights. Alone in a bungalow, with thunder-clouds piling up before the night and oppressed by the empty stillness of the woods, I have known what it is to be pervaded by an uneasy sadness, a warning sadness, as it were, the promise of life's futility, and of hopes that vanish. But one doesn't often have emotions like that in this land of tid'apa—" what does it matter ? " People are inclined to accept things as they come. They are here, the land is here, why worry ? All very well, too, if you can mould your thoughts to fit your theories ; but even the passive cheerfulness of the British in Malaya must be finding that philosophy a little threadbare under present conditions.

Yes, dusk is here, with night prodding at her heels. The breeze has passed, and with the lighting of the lamps the sultriness increases, wave on wave. Insects stridulate in the com-

pound, frogs and lizards come out of their corners, and a few fireflies drift vaguely by. There is a new moon rising beyond the trees, too tender as yet to dim the stars, but bright enough to start the "betting-bird" clicking on the gravel path. This Oriental night-jar derives its name from its habit of calling any uncertain number of times and then stopping for an instant, only to begin again. People bet on the number of calls in the same manner as in the Pegu Club in Rangoon they bet out of which hole of an inverted ash-tray a captured ant will issue. I've heard that bird click a hundred and fifteen times in succession—the noise resembles a Kaffir click much more than the note of a bird—and it will continue its efforts for hours on end.

Somehow, heat is more unbearable in darkness than in daylight. The unfortunate Rengan, whose duty it is to pull the punkah, nods at his task, and with a spasmodic flap the current ceases and perspiration breaks out on my face. An angry shout rouses him again and the dinner proceeds, an excellent dinner, though, of course, lacking in the ritualism of the Sunday's curry-tiffin. One does not exactly prepare oneself for curry-tiffin by prayer and fasting, though I think the fasting would

serve a purpose. Sunday afternoon is usually spent in a profound sleep produced by that generous dish. Yes, nature and ritual play their part in giving to this meal a peculiar significance. It comes on to the table hemmed about by some fifteen varieties of sambol, which means fifteen varieties of appetizers and condiments, each in its little coloured heap, ranging from dried fish to pounded chillies. I like chillies, especially; they're exciting things. They lead you on and on to try just how much burning you can stand in your mouth, and then, by Jove, they suddenly catch you out, and you are yelling for water. There is a good parable in that.

After curry it is proper to eat goola Malacca, in other words, Malacca sugar, in other words, cold sago pudding served with a syrup of dark sugar and with coco-nut milk, which is said to cool the tongue and is certainly very agreeable. I don't maintain that these curries are up to the standard of a Javanese rice-taffel, but I have often risen from them feeling rather dazed, if that may be called a recommendation. Perhaps, on the contrary, it is a weakness. But this is not tiffin, and it is not Sunday. No, it is a week-day dinner, and the Kuala Lumpur cold-storage, which means

Australia, is catering for us. And when dinner is over there is only one thing left to do, and that is, go to bed. The mosquitoes don't give you much choice.

But going to bed doesn't mean going to sleep if the " betting-bird " is awake. Indeed it doesn't ! The sound of that click, click, click gets incredibly on your nerves, and it used to drive me out into the clearing in my pyjamas with a handful of stones. The night-sky glittered above in the serene splendour of the constellations, and the burden of the engulfing woods was lost in the immensity of the firmament. The pallid blur of the stars and of the young moon filled the compound with deep shadows in the melting greyness. The woods were hushed ; they seemed to listen to some old, old voice, some wise, secretive voice, whispering of patience and of slow revenge. Even the pariah-dogs prowling up from the coolie-lines would appear unaccountably worried, as at a supernatural visitation. Their sneaking run would be punctuated by weird howls, and at the first stone hurled at the offending bird they would turn tail and bolt headlong through the plantation.

I would stand there, pondering in a sort of

perennial astonishment at the chance that had brought me to Malaya. " Here I am," I would think, " and in a few weeks I shall be in England." I presume that people who are going to be hanged also have such thoughts of contrast— " Now I am alive, next minute I shall be dead." You see, I knew that when I did return to bed even then I might not sleep. When the house was very quiet a scuttling would begin in the roof, a scuttling as of utterly abandoned rats, and these gambols were as destructive to slumber as the song of the bird without. I'm sure I don't know what made it ; my hostess used to assure me every morning that it was a moosang, but I'm rather sceptical about that cat-like animal. Yet there *was* something right enough ; I am not precisely deaf.

I fear that this chapter won't help the aspiring planter and that I have given it a title he may think misleading. But who wants to know the routine of an estate save those who know it already much better than do I ? The rubber drips, like milk, from the shaved cut into its receptacle, is collected, taken to the factory, worked up into " crêpe " or " sheet," and sent away. That's the story in a nutshell, and if any-

body says it's an empty nutshell, why, so it is. But I won't enlarge. I take pleasure, it is true, in studying the detail and management of concerns, but I fancy it is the kind of æsthetic pleasure one gets from the reading of learnèd books on subjects that are not one's own. The automatic running of the machine, the mystery and freemasonry of it all, are the basis of its appeal. On this particular estate, with its two thousand acres, there were four hundred coolies and five Europeans. I could but watch their work as from the cabined experience of a casual onlooker, but all the same it fascinated me. Yet, to the end, I felt just as much an outsider as were the shareholders living, unconcerned, in distant suburbs. To understand labour one must labour oneself; and often in a fit of despondency I would wander off to the Batu Caves near by, the caves that give their name to this celebrated plantation.

They open out from the tangled undergrowth of the cliff-side: one of them full of bats, white snakes, darkness, and evil vapours; the other lofty as a cathedral, with shafts of light piercing the upper rifts, fantastic in stalactite and stalagmite, and strangely lovely in the green metallic colour of its walls. Such huge caverns are not

uncommon in the limestone formations of Malaya, but their surroundings at Batu Caves have brought these particular ones a wide fame. The clothed rocks rise straight out of the level to a great height and form a notable landmark. Leopards and monkeys have their homes amidst the boulders, and the wooded density of the summits is never disturbed by the foot of man. No, man is much too busy keeping up his end against the jungle below. He wages one long warfare against the insidious return of the routed undergrowth. The fecundity of tropical nature aims at a universal wilderness, and, unlike man, she wearies not of a contest in which time is on her side. Sooner or later, in the unborn future, when man shall have altered the orientation of his life, she will slip back and obliterate utterly his labours. Even as it is, the weeding of an estate, the keeping of it clean, is a task that never stops. Gangs of women and boys are constantly at work ; you see them here and there stooping over the ground, covering slowly the whole acreage in regular rotation. Indeed, the culture of rubber is a science round which a library has accumulated. The experience of the last twelve years has resulted in a knowledge of bark-treatment,

of soils, of drainage, and of planting, that the pioneers scarcely needed to bother over in the prosperity of the early days. But to be a successful planter now you need to have a working knowledge of I don't know how many professions. No wonder it produces a capable type of man.

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OVER F.M.S. ROADS

Coming straight from Burma, which is an almost roadless country, nothing struck me more forcibly about the Federated Malay States than the number and excellence of their highways. They pierce all through this land of primeval jungles and foul swamps as if the Government had been seized with a frenzy of development in the surfeit of a boundless purse. It is not surprising that the scattered planters, in the solitary boredom of their lives, have come to regard motor cars as the one necessity of their social existence. At dusk the roads resound to their hoots as they carry them to the nearest town, and if Malaya, in its general monotony, be not a very scenic country for the tourist, it is an extraordinarily valuable one—that part of it which is opened up—for the man who wants to get about.

But the roads are alive not only with motors

and ox-carts, but with a pedestrian traffic that passes, passes, night and day with the absorption of a pilgrimage. The villages act as feeders to this endless, vague procession, in which old and young, Tamils, Chinamen, Malays, play their solemn parts beneath the dangerous sun or in the not less dangerous dark. A large percentage of the whole population seems to be everlastingly on the move, and with a sort of deliberate intensity that is rather mysterious. What business, what call, lead them forth? No doubt they are fulfilling economic laws: they look as if they were fulfilling a pious ceremonial.

I have noticed, near the towns, that time is either of no importance to the native or of the most immediate importance. If he isn't walking with concentrated deliberation, then he is flying around in a hired car. Nobody appears to know why. I had occasion, now and again, to alight at Batu Village, five miles from Kuala Lumpur, and I soon found out all about it. I had no settled means of getting back, I only knew that if I stood in the road and shouted at the first car that came along, ten to one it would be a hired car full of natives, and that it would invariably stop and make room for me somehow or other

and carry me to my destination. It didn't matter what hour of day or night it was, such cars were always coming, and they always seemed to be close-packed with resigned, spectral people, erect and silent as images, travelling at top-speed to the town from God knows where.

Now that I think of it, however, I must except one night from this rule. Torrential rain was falling, I remember, and the very earth reeled before the sweltering, blind fury of its lash. Then, indeed, no car was to be hoped for, and I began to march back on foot. There was something like exaltation in that trudge through the hot night, with the pouring rain singing amidst the trees and spurting up from the hidden road. The tropic jungle gobbled it as in the drunken appeasement of a deadly thirst. The bull-frogs were awake, and their metallic bellow, so mixed of groan and grunt and sigh and suck, was bubbling near and far. I could picture their squat, inflated bodies, their protruding eyes, the frantic excitement of their dull brains. And as I walked I reached a great tree alive with fireflies. They weren't flitting to and fro, they were trembling in it like a braid of silver stretched over a dusky woman's hair. They swarmed upon the leaves

in a vibrating glitter, as though lost in the abandonment of some exquisite aroma. All the surrounding forest remained dark; that tree alone held the secret of their desires.

It is a road I know well, the road from Kuala Lumpur to Batu Caves, past Batu Village; and to give a general idea of what motoring at night resembles in the F.M.S., I cannot do better than describe a night-drive over those nine miles. It is, let us say, an evening in January, and Kuala Lumpur reeks of the smell of durians. A disgusting and stuffy smell, yet perversely attractive in its absolute unlikeness to anything else. Malays are passionately addicted to durians, finding in them certain appealing qualities, and in the season every hamlet seems to be holding a durian-competition, so piled up are the sideways with the big fruit and so littered the streets with its husks. Through the dwindling town we steer up the Batu Road, and so, turning to the left, into country that grows more and more free from houses. The night is dim, and the lit-up car reveals at every instant swathed figures wandering up and down like homeless spirits. Secondary jungle rises up on either side, and above the middle of the road the lane of the starry sky

stretches infinitely in the illumined distance. The night-sky of Malaya has not our European brilliance. There is a veiled look about it as though the stars were slowly paling, a veiled look appropriate to the sombre spirit of the jungle. Some countries appear to invite you to them ; this one does not. It slumbers and sleeps.

We reach Sentul, lying between its Hindu temple and its railway station, between the old and the new, and we escape thankfully from its durian-laden breath. Darkness once more, the chorus of crickets, the fronds of the palms standing out above our heads, the lane of the heavens. The sensation of speed is increased at night and the cool fan of the wind passes over us in the stir of the sleeping forest. The sumptuous hours of living night hold all the jungle in their grip, and he who would know the tropic Orient must experience such within its fastnesses.

Before we reach Batu Village we have to pass a curious sort of native café chantant or theatre built there upon the roadside, from whose half-open doors issue ever and anon bursts of discordant music. It used to remind me of those lonely English public-houses frequented by yokels and made musical by country songs. But we

flash by and all is swallowed into the patient stillness of the night. And so through Batu Village with its Chinese, and along the road beyond, bordered by English-owned rubber-estates in apple-pie order. Batu Caves, silhouetted beneath its rocks, will soon be here. Yes, the nine miles are nearly over, but in this bare recital how little can one feel the magic pulse of the rhythmic Eastern night. Memory, whose outline is the mere tombstone of the past, holds in its heart the thrilling atmosphere of the times of yore : such things are wordless in their intensity.

Yes, it is sad to think that whatever you may say about events all remains to be said. Words are perpetual, but the essence of remembrance lies beyond their reach. What survives now of those drives but the trivialities of a cold page? But let us balance one thing with another and turn off now from Batu Village on a bright Sunday morning to join the members of the swimming club at the Jinjang pool. In this open-air bath within the rubber, hot from the sun but with little cold patches above its hidden springs, Kuala Lumpur society finds a weekly distraction. It is a nice way of spending a couple of hours, though I daresay a good many attend more to

enjoy the conversation of the ladies than to exhibit their prowess. And why not? At any rate, just to mention it is a cheerful method of ending a paragraph that began on too dismal a note. We may as well repeat with Candide that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. It won't make much difference.

Daylight motoring in the F.M.S. is vitiated by the sun; you have to keep the hood up and the view is hindered. Still, of course, a great deal of the distant motoring must be done by day, and the excellent rest-houses, either Federal or State, that lie dotted about the country enable one to avoid in shady rest the worst of the glaring hours. There are some remarkable passes over the hills, as, for instance, the pass that leads to Rawang; and the winding roads carry you up by forest-crowned precipices through the hushed twilight of primeval jungles, that, in the vast spread of the woods above, shut out for ever the full brilliance of the noonday sun. The hold of nature in those regions is savage in the bared teeth of its vitality, and one always hoped to see a tiger slinking into the thicket at the next turn. And there is no particular reason why one shouldn't; there are plenty of tigers about. Not

that Malaya is a good sporting country in the African sense: the big game, tiger, elephant, rhinoceros, wild cattle, have been mostly driven into impenetrable forests where the foot-sore pursuit is perilous and often vain; and as for the small game, with the exception of the snipe-shooting about Krian, which is the best in the world, and the green-pigeon shooting on the coast, there isn't much to be had. However, you never quite know what you may see along a Malay country road; the only thing you may be sure you won't see is the ordinary bird-life of the tropics. That pleasant touch is singularly absent from this land of silence.

No doubt the best times for motoring in Malaya are dawn and twilight. Dawn I am prepared to take for granted, but twilight motoring I know well. It is delicious to slip down out of some gloomy pass into the flushed softness of a valley lying there in radiant quiet before the approach of night. Then, indeed, you can lower the hood and begin to breathe. I can imagine that even Klang, where the Sultan of Selangor lives, would be passable at such an hour, and I can almost imagine the same about Port Swettenham. But, no, I must be careful not to exaggerate.

The Malayan road offers many a strange human spectacle to the motorist. The ceremony of Taipusem, for instance, at the end of January, brings out to Batu Caves a swelling crowd of pious Hindus. They jostle and shove, they press forward with fervent hope, making for the open cave turned for that day into a temple. At the foot of the rocks booths of all sorts have been erected, and just men bathe in the river, cleansing themselves for the ascent with punctilious earnestness. The real sight of the whole straggling procession, with its banners, its shouts, its air of triumphant renunciation, is the sight of those who to prove the sincerity of their faith come drugged and panting on the way with knives stuck right through their cheeks or nails driven into every square inch of their bodies. It is very horrible. The fanatics sway, uttering occasional wolfish cries, with foam at their lips, and their friends surround and urge them on as though their torture were about to end in paradise. Looking at them, one looks at mediæval India. Some people say that the whole thing is an imposture (perhaps on the principle that all stage-illusions used to be explained away by the word " mirrors "), but I certainly don't see where the

imposture comes in. The wounds, it is true, are bloodless to your sight, but I am told that the preparation of the victims is revolting. They are worked up into a frenzy, and then being dealt with by those responsible, are launched upon the road. In the great cave the knives and nails are drawn out, the man is given a lime to suck and sent upon his way, but I wonder how many go off and die secretly like dogs? The test of sanctity must often be the gate of death.

But a love of processions is, indeed, the common heritage of Indians and of Chinese, especially processions of a religious nature overlaid with trappings. They seem to be conducted with good temper and to excite no opposition. In fact, the tolerance of this country is as remarkable in religion as in politics. This religious tolerance, I suspect, is largely due to the accident that neither Mohammedan Malays, Hindu Indians, nor Confucian Chinese dwell near the centres of their faith. For the tendency of Eastern religions is to grow weaker on the outskirts. But whatever be the reason, Malaya is a land of mildly-held opinions, and in that respect can compare favourably — if to hold important opinions

mildly is a sound thing—with other countries notably given over to the enunciation of moral precepts.

Whoever motors through Malaya must feel two things above all, the murderous white glare of her sun and the brooding immensity of her forests. They *are* the country. This toneless and inchoate land destroys selection and fills one at last with a sort of coma of the spirit. The very villages in their brown meagreness crouch along the side of the road as though to escape from the grip of the trees. They have a self-contained appearance, and whatever race they hold, they hold that race alone. Far in the jungle, remote from the pushful enterprise of Europeans, they are mostly Malay villages or kampongs. I wish I had a clearer grasp of the character of this nation. Do the people welcome the roads that run everywhere with so odd a nonchalance, as if calling out perkily, "Business, progress, make way," or do they resent them, and all they stand for, with something of the dumb resentment of the wilderness? Perhaps so; it is very difficult to know what they really think, and though they use the roads to advantage they may easily distrust the whole con-

ception of our Western civilization. It would not astonish me in the least.

Speeding along these roads, passing sign-boarded rubber estate after rubber estate and tin-mine after tin-mine, anybody who has ever held conversations with stockbrokers — a fatal way of passing the time—must have the curious experience of feeling himself in a kind of rural Throgmorton Street. In the familiarity of names which, like the memory of former loves, can evoke but the shadow of dead sensations, there is a touch of the dream-world. One knows the country without knowing it, one recalls across the seas, across the years, how those very names once played their part, and one feels suddenly isolated in the ramifications of memory. Another existence stands over the fleeting present, shining sepulchrally. Old episodes, however extravagant, are yet statuesque in their finished contours. Their breath upon the days that are is chill, but it is queer to feel the dead riot of one's youth upon the staid air of nearly forty. (But are people, deep down, ever staid?) Here are the places whose names are shouted out daily nine thousand miles away in the mere greediness of speculation. Here toil the men who live arduous

and uncertain lives so that shareholders may preen themselves, shareholders who often don't even know precisely in what countries their estates lie. The whole thing gives one a mingled sense of sadness and unreality.

I rather enjoy my own incommunicable private life, lived not hermitwise, but in the ordinary course of an ordinary existence. Reserve, as a matter of fact, is not best achieved by silence ; it is best achieved by talking to everybody about the usual things. And there is no dignity in life without reserve ; and without dignity what is there, anyhow ? Amusement ? No, life is not really very amusing. It's slightly too painful to be varnished over by that word. If we have to go through with it don't let us indulge in these soporifics. Certain illusions we must have, but they should not be illusions at the expense of our personalities.

ON A MALAYAN BALCONY

It is wonderful how fresh these tropical mornings can be. ("That strange gentle simplicity of the Malay early mornings," as a friend of mine so beautifully puts it.) I come out on to this balcony about half-past six to eat fruit, and it reminds me of the dawn of a summer day at home. The air is cool, there is a mist upon the swamps, and the birds are twittering. Low-lying flats, sprinkled with occasional huts and old tin-workings, sweep wide before me to the edge of the jungle, and beyond that, again, a range of wooded hills, strangely azure at this pellucid hour, undulates, fold within fold, against the sky. I begin to write these words at just such a time, though this morning the hills are hidden, exceptionally, by clouds and a fine rain is falling, dimpling the pool of water at the foot of the garden like an evening dance of midges. Bullock-carts

have begun to crawl about the flats ; the creaking of their wheels and the cries of their drivers are borne up here in the tinkling thin notes of distance. Far away a dog barks, and everywhere the curious stir of unseen, awaking life is swelling and rising. The hills are beginning to emerge ; the mass of clouds has lifted, and the billowy pockets in the hollows are smoking off like forest-fires all blowing in one direction. A flock of white-headed finches has fluttered down on to the shaved grass of the lawn and waterfowl are skulking along the edge of the reeds. All is peaceful ; another day has opened.

There is something in this picture, something in its mingled repose and space, that touches, as with a probe, a nerve of analytic consciousness. I would be content just to sit here and look out idly upon the scene, and yet, as I sit, my mind simmers with half-formed thoughts which branch and mix and change. In the luxurious quiet, when the Chinese boys have retired to the back to resume their interrupted slumbers, I feel an unrest within myself, as though every thread I wanted to follow died out in nothingness before the vast fecundity of this southern land. To select is the first difficulty of creation. That,

I suppose, is why one is always attempting with the people one meets to sum them up both as individuals and as types. What fabrics of novels I see around me daily! Yet every group of persons in every part of the world would give one similar problems under different guises, and one must resolutely put aside this sort of realism for the romantic realism of an enlarged horizon. The bare truth is not convincing; even tragedy, in art, must appear noble and tremendous, whereas, in life, there is another kind of tragedy almost more devastating, the tragedy, not to have loved and lost, but to have loved and grown cold. It is terrible to think that nothing endures for ever, that time is always at work smoothing away the recollections of the past and the dreams of youth, that even the memory of our beloved dead fades gradually into utter oblivion. Yes, it is terrible, but it is natural. How quickly, for instance, one's life comes to be almost entirely bound up with the people of one's immediate acquaintance. It must be so when one feels the many complex human problems on every hand, and is instinctively trying to unravel things as they are apart from what they appear. Such thoughts come without effort and are seductive

in the way they range over innumerable points. But if we could only look clearly into our own minds, let alone the minds of others! I sometimes fancy that we know nothing about anybody save in so far as we know that part of ourselves, and that that is why certain persons, not in the least exciting, are inscrutable, as though they dwelt on a different plane. Each of us lives, beneath the surface, another existence, contemptuous and mocking of the outer man, an existence at once passionate and scoffing. At the very moment of giving oneself away, how often is one laughing maliciously at one's tormentor! Ah, these superior people, built on their little formulas, what children they are! One does meet occasionally with an armed personality, but they are scarce because sincerity of the right sort is scarce. Of the right sort. It depends what you are sincere about. People who would overturn the world for a theory, people who would steal your watch, are often quite sincere. But in the armed personality there must exist balance and imagination and simplicity and compassion. It's an unusual mixture.

Mankind, of course, is stupid, but also obscure. Most of us seem commonplace, yet the

very insipidity of our conventionalism conceals cloudy depths of ancestral instincts and outlandish glints of our unshared personalities. The most elaborate character of fiction is the mere shell of a human being, and the five thousand creations of Balzac resemble, after all, so many facets of the author more than anything else. The greater the novelist, the greater the individualist. One might take the characters from a dozen worthless writers and combine them in one book without any particular incongruity, but if one were to try this experiment with the true creators the result would be grotesque. The illusion of reality would disappear in proportion as the illusion had been powerful. But then, life is not a choice of goods, it's a choice of evils, and if we must hold on to it by illusions, by all means let us have illusions—provided they are illusions in our " tone." In any case, we are not logical, though we like to persuade ourselves that our actions are founded on reason. Quite apart from passion and prejudice, they are much more often founded on intuition.

And intuition, false as it may often appear, is, no doubt, an asset of observation, a kind of reading of the aura of personality. That is what makes these

glimpses of other people come so easily and be, I repeat, so seductive. But there is, perhaps, another reason for their seductiveness. Certain ideas only lose themselves by being uttered, not because they are not real, but because they belong, if I may so put it, to some sense whose conclusion turns inward. Words don't explain much. Shall we be compelled at last, like the modern logicians, to seek in mathematical symbols a finer mode of expression? Without an effort of thought we read the subtleties of a character, even to its abstruse permutations, we sum up a whole life in a wordless phrase. And that is but one rather clumsy example. For about ten years now I have had the plot of a novel in my head; I lie awake at night and I see it before me, the figures, the scenes, the very pulse of the atmosphere, and yet I know that if I were to put pen to paper it would suddenly wither, as the bodies of kings thousands of years old, lying robed and splendid in their sarcophagi, wither at a breath of air. I tried it once and I know. Is it simply that I lack capacity, or is it that nothing would ever satisfy the deeply-pondered idea? Even in the solitude of the night, surrounded by these living emanations, I almost tremble when I try to form in

words a single sentence. I admit that concentrated thought is a horrible nuisance and that vagueness may give one a comfortable sense of illimitable future achievement, but surely that is not all the problem. There are four things—imagination, mentality, capacity for expression, power of work, and these four together may be useless without genius. Not that I really know what genius is, unless we assume it to be, in this sense, the rare outward manifestation of what we all possess voicelessly ; but as people are fond of discussing it, why not discuss it ? I can't accept the argument that where talent ceases genius begins. Genius and talent are not of the same order, though, of course, the framework of each is the same. In all the labour of genius there is something effortless, but, however closely self-conscious talent can simulate genius, the soaring quality is absent from its look of strain. Genius, not being hereditary like talent, is the unique expression of man's unique gift of personality. That is why it is so thrilling ; it gives a motive to life in general through the mere contemplation of attained heights. As for the misuse of the word, that is inevitable with our present emotional standards ; untutored opinion runs quickly to

seed. The rarity of genius is little understood in the glib uses to which the term is put.

I spoke of my novel, that unsuspected sharer of my couch, and the thought of it brings to my mind other books I have fancied writing, and probably never shall write. For instance, rummaging about this house the other day I came, of all things, upon a copy of *The Idiots*. I have been reading it every afternoon, lying down on my bed before falling asleep, and it has made me remember a long-cherished wish to write a series of essays on some great and, I think, not fully understood novels. It does seem to me that certain books, such books, let us say, as *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *The Ambassadors*, *Nostromo*, and *The Idiots*, have a kind of inner pattern in them which must have been of the first importance to the author, but about which he never said a word. They wait there, these patterns, mysterious and unobserved, until one day they will at last be revealed and all will be made plain. Is it, perhaps, the authentic note of passion, the rarest and most powerful thing in literature, the note which can be heard occasionally in the most diverse works, and heard cannot be mistaken, from *Othello* even to *The Garden of Kama*?

Again, I once planned out a work to be called *The Psychology of Women in their Relationships with Men*, but I didn't know where it would lead me, so stopped. (Apart from that, I knew next to nothing of the subject!) People nowadays have a mania for writing books about women, people with liberal and advanced tendencies, but I'm afraid they are too fond altogether of the "Woman Question," by which they mean only, "Are women men in petticoats?" It reminds me of Miss Hitchener's effusion (Miss Hitchener, the angular and ardent friend of a poet's youth), which began, "All, all are men—women and all!" But it is not really true, though it seems to worry them a great deal. Indeed, the interesting women are not even intellectual, though they have intellect. Feminists don't see the point; but then, what can you expect of people who believe that the difference of sex is mainly physical? A wise man never tells the woman he loves all he has observed about her, and the more he loves her the more reticent will he be. There are moments when she invites such confidences, but she does not forget and one day she will make him suffer. Yes, and suffer the more, the more she loves him. It is very natural and often only

her way of pointing out that observation may be both accurate and blind. And men have their memories too, but they use them rather to form a picture than to make a scene. All people who care deeply keep a mental plus-and-minus account. Men and women, as a class, have rootedly unfavourable ideas about one another, but as individuals—ah, that is a story on its own! Great love is like a rising tide covering obliviously the wrecks of other days and the warning rocks within the soul.

There can be no final explanation between men and women because there is no ultimate common denominator. And one reason for this is that in all love there are the seeds of jealousy. A man may be dissolute, but when he loves his whole being is fanatically bound up with one woman; your true polygamist is a monogamist at any given instant. On the other hand, a woman may love dearly and yet be unable to deny herself the pleasure—which implies passive encouragement—of other men's admiration. The echo of the siren's song! Only when love, at its height, is entirely reciprocal is there no suspicion—and how often does that happen, and how long does it last? A woman wants the man she cares for to be jealous

of her just up to the point that will reassure her of his affection, but beyond that—no. Unfortunately you can't regulate these things. Thus, while a man feels the positive side of jealousy, the hot and sinking pain of it, a woman knows usually but the negative side, the laceration of nerves that comes from unjust suspicions. Women's fear of convention (which is partial) joined to their fear of men (which is undying) keep them often silent when all is ready to be told. They know too well the fatal paradox of desire.

It is idle to deny that women are fond of playing the game of " Heads I win and tails you lose " (which they have re-named " Heads you win and tails I lose " without altering the rules); but though they play it with alarming skill—I mean, the ones that matter—yet the funny thing is that they have no sooner triumphed than they are liable to hand the proceeds over to some man, who, as likely as not, has placed the pieces for the game to begin with. Women have towards the men they love—I exclude, of course, the female megalomaniac, who is a phantom of all the horrors —an infinite generosity. They may be cunning at times, they may be unscrupulous even, but their generosity outweighs all their faults and is

beautiful in its selflessness. They are more stoical than men, but less imaginative, and the combination of these two things enables them to end an experience with a finality men hate having to face. Now that women have more liberty, they are showing in their very approximation to man in some respects how unfathomable is the gulf that divides them from him in others. In judging them we must remember that we never have all the evidence.

It is probably useless to dogmatize about a whole sex, though there are characteristics that are universal in each and different in each, but what one can say with safety is that the desire to taste life without paying the price is extremely feminine — and, perhaps, in the circumstances, extremely reasonable. Women accumulate admiration as a snowball accumulates snow: that's how many of them express the innermost need of their personalities. Man's egotism is a shameless gesture of dominance, but woman's egotism is fiercely secretive. With numbers of charming women emotion takes the place of deep feeling, and therefore they are constantly in the throes of changing moods. When they make their promises they mean them—but then promises are for the

future. Their broken word is not really a broken word; it's you who have altered. Of course! A certain type of woman is never in the wrong. Dialectically she may score, but nevertheless she loses. For the basis of permanent love is the sense of security—I don't mean dull security, which is the basis of disaster—and the knowledge that you will be yielded in full measure what you yield. The woman whose life is half impulsive action and half following the line of least resistance finds no real happiness. Such women are greatly to be pitied for their instability, but they are greatly to be blamed for letting men believe that they are stable. Yet, after all, it is men who invent glorified characters for the women they care for. They deserve their punishment. The woman was never a goddess, she was merely a woman. She but pretended, probably unconsciously, what she knew the man wanted her to pretend. The idea that woman's eyes are the gateway to heaven is only nature's little trick. That liquid glance covers every shade from touching femininity to profound mental corruption; and, in any case, it covers sorrow, sorrow, sorrow. For life is sorrow, and she was given that glance that she might give life.

There is another side to the picture. If women are only women, men assuredly are only men. They don't always appear to remember that. The pangs of martyrdom give many a man a flattering idea of his own constancy: the chief bitterness of unrequited love is often the wound to vanity. And what really do women think of men? Do they have a kind of fixed belief that all men are overgrown babies? I rather think so, and I rather think also that no woman ever credits a man with understanding the difficulties of her position. She has a logic of her own which she knows is right without being explainable. When we think they are only wanting to evade the price of happiness they are listening agonizingly to an internal voice telling them that they are still unsatisfied. It's not that they wouldn't dare—so they would argue—it's that the daring wouldn't help. A woman will go through much for the man she loves, but every now and then she gets a sort of panic in which her one aim is to escape. The very type that can't give a sense of security, itself craves for that sense. . . . Well, never mind: the great thing is to put up a good fight. You criticize most what you need most. It is the law of compensation.

Excuse these garrulous remarks. I am just letting my mind browse upon the subjects that come uppermost. Somebody has said that people would do anything rather than think. I agree. I would even do almost anything rather than write, and at this very second I have the strongest inclination to throw down my pen, lean back in my cane-chair, and gaze out over the flats. I daresay I shall succumb before long; indeed, it's a very short while since I took the opportunity for a rest by watching the two dogs at their breakfast on the gravel. Or rather, one was having his breakfast, a small black dog of distinguished but mixed pedigree, while the other, which resembles a fox-terrier in some lights, looked on awaiting his turn, with his nose glued to the ground between his paws and an expression of concentrated anxiety on his face. How one's thoughts wander as one takes in every detail of a scene like that. I began to think of all sorts of things, of how weak people insist on confiding in you and then never forgive you; of how annoyed your modern sinner would be at what he would call Christ's lack of psychological insight if he were to appear to him and say, "Go and sin no more"; of how the failure to remember some

unessential name will give one a sort of mental toothache ; of how lack of honour about money is absolutely destructive to the reality of an individual. Man is certainly a queer animal, and not a very pleasant one.

Yes, anything to stop thinking, to stop writing, to conquer time. It's not so much that writing is a labour, though, of course, it is (even a hardened feuilleton novelist once informed me that he charged 2s. 6d. extra per thousand words for " polish "), but that, though my thoughts may be clear, my pen muddles them. One runs on and on, and the end is the wastepaper basket. Moreover, my restlessness is not appeased by writing ; it only evokes further images and awakens again the pain of life. Riches, power, love, these are the three ruling passions of the world, and woe to him who obtains them or obtains them not. But that's more like the theme of another unwritten book. The day is growing hotter and stiller, but its stillness has lost the wine-like vitality of the morning and is gross with torpor. Nature droops and the very house itself seems mournful in its immobility. It begins to be haunted for me at this hour by that friend of eighteen years who died in it a few months ago.

Poor P. P., they are having a tombstone erected to him in the town and the mason has just written to say that it is ready, at the same time " soliciting further orders." I can just imagine the slow smile that would break over his face. He was a man without illusions on life, I mean the ordinary illusions, for most ideas on life are illusions, but of a remarkably warm and loyal heart. And now I shall never set eyes on him again.

Death's sting, blunted for us by the war, has sharpened in the decrease of its victims. But I am rather glad I'm not starting life afresh. I don't want a future governed by the two extremes, by those who take a mystical view of themselves and their message, and by the pure materialists who know precisely what they want and have no scruples. No, I don't ; there wouldn't be enough humour left. They'll join hands, these two extremes, and take away our liberty in order to regenerate us. The freed slave remains a slave at heart. The world certainly is in a bad way—though I gather that it always has been. That's a complaint that never varies. There's something frivolous and shallow about its very reformers : emancipated people seem to me singularly hide-

bound. And why are the self-righteous so spiteful? Why are they? It's a question worth asking. To hold unpopular opinions is not inevitably a sign of virtue, any more than to believe, as such people usually do, that their political theories will cleanse the world is a sign of sagacity. It's odd that as we come more and more to perceive that the rounded solutions of the scientists won't hold water, and that the further we enquire into spirit and matter the more do they elude us, so do a lot of us propose to save mankind by the most machine-like theories, as though we were so many rabbits. Doubtless the reformer is often persuaded that the imperfections of humanity stop short at himself and that if we could only be all like him . . . but I don't like this slave-philosophy masquerading under conceit. But, of course, at the back of those ideas there is a kind of groping towards a great truth, that the world is unhappy because the world is complex. That, surely, is what is meant by the opening words of *Anna Karenina*, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Happiness is the supreme simplifier.

Utopias differ, though they are at one in assuming that everything that isn't is, of necessity, better

than everything that is. But, unfortunately, cataclysms don't change the nature of man perceptibly, which, if more sinful than that of the angels, is decidedly less anæmic. Nobody pretends that our civilization is perfect, but it's man's own fault because it's man's own product. Man, too, is imperfect. Why theorize on the subject of whether we would be better if we had two heads? I don't even like the idea of a Utopia, but that, I presume, will be met with the shattering remark, "Oh, I see, a reactionary." Devastating word, isn't it? Reactionary—a person who differs from yourself. It doesn't frighten me a bit; I've seen too many stalwarts with the "soft spot." But what does it all matter? The world goes on; it will outlast my time.

I have spent practically the whole day on this balcony, and the evening has begun to close in. There is nothing more tiring than such inactivity. I need the dark powdered sky and the feeling of cold harmony that comes to me when I see the stars and know that they are all moving for ever and differently on their appointed courses. On my left, bordered by a rubber plantation and sprinkled about with coco-nut palms, is a low white bungalow roofed in

terra-cotta tiles, and on my right, standing solitary on a hill, is the house of a Chinaman. They each give me at this hour a different and a precious emotion. One is an emotion of warm felicity, and one is an emotion of aloof reserve. The passions that disturb us in the disordered and sinister web of life find no counterpoise save in peace and in philosophy. Such are our only havens, and, staring now at these houses growing more limpid in the dusk, they seem to typify for me those twin desires whose fruit is wisdom and not Dead Sea apples.

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SKETCHES OF PERAK

I WAS glad to go to Ipoh, in Perak (of which word you don't pronounce the *k*) for various reasons, and one of them was that it enabled me to make a long train journey by day through Malaya. The run takes five hours from Kuala Lumpur and is a jungle experience. The tangled forests lie close along the track, and great banks of fern, a network of green lace, slope upwards into the dark woods. Sometimes the jungle is broken by plantations of rubber and sometimes by river-beds, as, for instance, at the flooded town of Kuala Kubu, but the general effect is as of a piercing of the wilderness. The downpour of the March rains was visible in glittering pools along the line and gave one the odd sensation of traversing an endless swamp. There is an appalling sameness about the jungle; in the excess of its turbulent growth it becomes

incoherent and loses its individuality. One longs for plains, for mountains of bare rock, for the desert itself. One is stifled. But towards Ipoh the scene does alter. You pass into a wide valley, flanked by hills and scratched all over by the workings of alluvial tin mines. The whole of Malaya is, of course, more or less saturated with tin, but Ipoh is one of the chief centres of the industry. As the rubber plantations are worked by Tamils and Javanese, so are the tin mines worked by Chinamen. The Malay, too proud usually to labour for another, is willing to prospect, but is not willing to let himself out for hire.

The journey was unbearably hot. The jungle, damp at its roots, steamed before the sun, and its dripping breath was like a double row of warm pipes in the already burning compartment. The change into the scarred valley of the Kinta, with its open spaces and its signs of men in place of the vast impersonal struggle of the jungle, came to me with a touch of physical and mental relief. I felt no longer the weight of the forests, that overwhelming sense of nature triumphant, that reeking sense of insane vitality. There is nothing in the whole inanimate world more hopeless than the jungle ; you feel puny before it. And yet

you have somewhere the lurking wish, the deep call of primitive man, not to oppose it any longer, but to lose yourself in its shade, to forget your Europeanism in the dim recesses of its untamed heart.

The town of Ipoh is a satisfactory antidote to such fancies, for of all the towns of this country it is the neatest and most modern in the trim American plan of its outlay. The streets run parallel with one another and cross at right angles, the roads have a brushed appearance, and the growing town is carefully patched on to the chess-board of the built. A model place, but without that destroying blight of the "model village." It is not artificial. The surrounding country is broken by ranged hills, whose blue distances take on a liquid tinge at twilight, and whose limestone rocks, visible in bosses and pinnacles between the massive vegetation, show very white in the clear far-off.

Altogether, Ipoh is rather an attractive spot, though I daresay it is also rather tame. There it lies in its metalliferous valley, watched by its untrodden hills, and year by year it swells in size as its tin-concentrates go rumbling to the sea. I am not astonished that its inhabitants exhibit

local enthusiasm. There is something delightful in its appearance of precision against the chaos of the crouching wilderness; one might imagine that it had been thus planned as a gesture of defiance. One might, but one would be wrong. Towns aren't built nowadays by knights-errant, and people don't fling their gauntlet at nature unless they mean to make money out of her. Ipoh owes her configuration solely to modern ideas of convenience; she doesn't even owe it to socialistic theories of equality—as one might imagine in another mood. But though poets are never likely to have a hand in the matter of town-planning, it is just on the cards that communists may, and their erections might well resemble an exaggerated Ipoh in their hope of standardizing man and his works in a universal throttling of initiative. I admit it would have to be very exaggerated. But what I really want to know of those future times, when all of us shall have cast off the trammels of individualism, is this, What is going to happen about sex? When we advance, or revert (whichever it is), it may be easier, but as things are it won't be so very easy. Love is a possessive emotion; it's the absolute original basis of our sense of property. It will be difficult

to drown that desire of individual ownership, with all its associations of a separate home. At least, I should have thought so, but I suppose that when we have put off the old Adam—what a prospect! . . . With such side-issues do I cover up my ignorance of Ipoh.

Yes, I cover it up quite shamelessly. My friends lived outside the town, and their lawns and coco-nut grove kept me from the streets in happy seclusion. Why recall my idle Ipoh hours? They were the image of ten thousand other forgotten hours, whose procession makes up the inner history of a life. Where is the master of half-tones who shall unbare all and make the dead past live? The landmarks rise above the tide, but the self-communion of our solitariness is the sunken reef which nothing ever reveals. (It's not the first time in this book I have touched on this subject.) Even the smoothest character has recesses in it that are not to be explored, sorrows which corrode like gaping wounds and hopes which are too iridescent for speech. It is not a phrase; it is the truth: is there any pain like the passion of regret or any joy like the wonder of revelation? If we were to follow out everything that flashes through a man's brain in the twenty-four

hours, every nipped impulse and fantastic notion and cynical insight and lovely gleam, what an extraordinary kind of being he would appear. (And yet, would he? Would he really? Why not let me introduce you to Mr. Pan-Pepys-Silenus-Shelley; you and he must have such a lot in common.) Outward existence is synchronized roughly to an adopted standard, and in the same way as we instinctively know where to put our hands to catch a cricket ball, so do we instinctively know how to regulate our thoughts into an accepted channel.

Beyond the town, along the road to Teluk Anson, which beautifully skirts the winding rampart of the foliaged rocks, Chinese have constructed of recent times strange temples within the hollow limestone, temples devoted, apparently, to a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—whatever sort of mongrel religion that results in. They look curious from the road, with their windows cut in the cliff-face like some monastery of old, and one pictured vista on vista of lamp-lit halls going back into the bowels of the earth. But though, indeed, there were such things, crooked passages, rock-chambers, vault leading into vault, yet there was something in-

finitely tawdry and uninspiring about it all. The dirt, the confusion, the smell and chirrup of bats, the sense of haphazard vulgarity—everything disgusted me. The places were for cheap show, not for religious ecstasy. That was what was wrong. Yet from some of those embrasures, high upon the rock, peerless views expanded, and the very emotion that was dead within seemed to hang in tranced solemnity upon the shining stillness of the valley.

The climate of Ipoh is said to be bracing, but it is not the word I should use. Malaya has its points, but its towns, carved out of low-lying equatorial forests, are not bracing. That is the least applicable expression, unless it be claimed for Ipoh that its afternoon rain-storms, let loose by the encircling hills, have some effect in that direction and give the word a relative value. The air is humid ; a box of matches left overnight by your bed-side will not strike in the morning. The whole country falls, in varying degrees, within the tropical rain-belt, and the wealth of the jungle is the creation of those seas that wash this narrow peninsula. It is the greenest country on earth, and as colours, no doubt, influence one's equanimity, the nervous

exhaustion caused by Malaya may be partially explained by her green monotony. But there are also other reasons. The longer one lives in the tropics, the clearer one perceives their complete divorce from one's inward idea of home. For the idea of home is the idea of rest, and the note of the tropics is unrest in the ferment of their growth beneath the aching sun.

My friends and I left Ipoh one Sunday afternoon to motor the thirty-two miles to Kuala Kangsar. A typical Malay drive through forests and villages and over an incongruously perfect road. I remember that when we got a puncture and were compelled to draw up opposite some wretched hovels, we were immediately surrounded by a crowd of gaping children, just as though it had been an English road-side. But you couldn't have mistaken those tonsured pot-bellied kids for Saxons ! And from a kedai opposite a Chinaman came forth to argue with another Chinaman, as you may see neighbours anywhere exchange remarks over their garden-walls ; while in that cascade of spitting language, punctuated with flourishes like rapier-thrusts, there was exhibited to us for half an hour the immemorial histrionic eloquence of the East.

Kuala Kangsar is situated beyond the broad brown Perak river and is crossed by a pontoon-bridge, the planks of which rattle and heave beneath the moving car. The town itself lies back from the water and is lost amidst its trees, but from the high road leading to the Residency and the Sultan's Palace, a view, noble and calm as a Claude, includes in one sweep the river, the forests, and the hills. The great stream flows murkily between steep banks of jungle, and the mounting roll of the hills, all velvet in their unbroken verdure, stretches out on either side, re-echoing, as it were, for ever the song of the morning stars. Yet, lovely though it be, there is something forbidding in the silence of this immense landscape. It seems to hold the spirit of a heavy-lidded god, of an evil, jewelled god, brooding ominously upon the time of his stirring.

Of all easily accessible places in Malaya this is probably the finest. Indeed, it is so obviously magnificent that, with one's eyes on it, it was hard to credit the theory that appreciation of scenery is of modern growth, a sort of off-shoot of the Romantic Revival. But though I doubt that, yet I am inclined to think that our very appreciation wanes as we grow older unless it can be

mingled somehow or other with different images, with associations of humanity, with general ideas.

We had come to Kuala Kangsar to see the Sultan of Perak invested in his home with the K.C.M.G. by the High Commissioner, Sir Laurence Guillemard, Governor of the Straits Settlements. In the official and complimentary precision of such proceedings, and in the formal routine of all ceremonial functions, it is difficult to delve beneath the surface, but it was certainly curious to watch the Malay princes " play up " to British etiquette while grafting on to it their own ideas of politeness. Amidst the uniforms and stylish costumes of the English, the Malays, gorgeous in their many-coloured silk sarongs and with their krisses at their waist-belts, passed, supple and gracious, and wearing, I thought, a slightly ironical smile on their dark faces. The function went off with perfect good-breeding—even the State elephants made their salaams at the proper moment—and the speeches in the throne-room were exactly what such speeches always are. Apart from the ordinary, and often lukewarm, interest one feels in any sort of novelty, there was much in that well-rehearsed scene to arouse one's attention. One felt the mystery of

the relationship of East and West, and the spectacle itself was arresting in the glitter of a ritualism passing from us for ever. It seems unaccountable that this people, so full of elaborate customs, should have so traditionless a history. What has happened to them in these long years since they wandered north from Java? (By the way, have all peoples wandered from somewhere else? Are there no races settled now where they were settled in the beginning? It is disturbing to read of nothing but migrations.) Wars and rumours of wars? Nobody knows with any exactitude; the curious enquire and rout, and the Government issue booklets, but the true facts are missing. There is a kind of emptiness in the air, as though the memory of what was gone had been washed clean away or hidden deep in graves.

Unless it be some group of South Sea Islands whose natives are too simple to have substituted discontent for cannibalism, I doubt whether there is a more politically-stable place in the whole world than Malaya. One feels but little that discontent of the East in the insidious problem of racial animosity. It is beginning, I'm afraid, and will grow unless the disease itself dies out in the change of things, will grow both from

China and from India, but meanwhile the country is at peace. The nightmare of unrest hardly stirs upon that sleeping land. The white man is accepted ; he is not cringed to and cursed behind his back as in India, he is not regarded with hatred and distrust as in China ; no, he is accepted calmly as a phenomenon likely to do things from incomprehensible motives, but likely to do them extremely well. Such a remark, of course, does not attempt to summarize the complex mentality of the Malay, which may even have eluded, in some respects, the wide knowledge of men like Sir Frank Swettenham and Sir Hugh Clifford, but in the peculiar atmosphere of that country one does feel that it is cogent within its limits. One does feel that. As I watched the ceremony of installation, and heard the trumpets blare, and saw the bright colours of the mingling throng, I felt around me the spirit of a rather indifferent, you might almost say rather a contemptuous, goodwill. When will the Sikh agitators slip through the vigilant guard of the port authorities (here, as in Europe, the dangerous men are probably the obscure men), when will the natural tendency towards political change take on the dark tinge of racial hatred ? It is vain to specu-

late on the future of countries, but we all do it. Malaya is a small place and her great wealth has been acquired in a few years. But now, indeed, the hour of misfortune has struck, and with distress comes muttering. The capital that poured in from Europe, expanding like yeast upon these golden shores, is melting from week to week. But man overcomes his troubles because man must live, and Malaya, with her fertile soil, will never sink into a mere echo of past prosperity.

A string of such musings, dancing light as the glass balls on the water-jets of a shooting-gallery, floated through my mind as, retired at length from those festive scenes, I reclined upon a long chair on the verandah of the State Rest-house. I was all alone. A few figures hovered about the tree-sheltered street in front, but on my right and left the Club and the Federal Rest-house were deserted. Only I, apparently, was not buzzing on some great man's heels or snatching sleep before the evening. I just lay there in comfort, and tried to read the future in time's clouded glass. I believe I ought to have gone to a banquet that night, but I went to bed instead. And the next day I ought to have taken part in a menggelunchor, which means getting into

a bathing-dress and sliding on a leaf down a watery rock into a pool in the forest, but I avoided it for no particular reason and returned to Kuala Lumpur. In fact, I missed all the official rejoicings, and though I moderately regret it, yet I am not unaware that rejoicings of this sort have been known to pall. To be happy to order is rather a strain.

THE EXIT

As the lights of Colombo dwindled astern, dying out upon the shrouded sea, I knew that the mantle of the East had slipped from off my shoulders. The destination of a steamer gives one curiously the immediate sense of the place to which she is bound, and there, upon the dark Indian Ocean, I felt England all about me. The East was as a closed page whose words ring in the memory when the book is laid aside. In my future dreams, when I should tread again the Asiatic roads and meet the friends of yesterday, it would be with that uneasiness one dreams of the dead, not understanding that they are dead but knowing instinctively that there is something wrong. There is pain in the fond minuteness of any recollection.

Continents through all their variations have yet a kind of unity, and the very mention of the

East conveys to me a woven Asiatic idea, which is the utter antithesis to Europeanism. And being in one country or continent is rather like smoking one brand of cigarettes for a certain period—it suits more and more the developed mood. So that even should you wish to leave, there is a wrench in the parting. And as for me, I didn't wish to leave. I listened to those beastly propeller beats as one listens to the ticking of a clock in a time of crisis. How a ship carrying one from friends can resemble a sullen and relentless animal with the bit between her teeth ! Indeed, the only consolation in all these partings is the knowledge of your free volition ; you go not so much because you have to, but because, by going, you trust to gain some vantage in the boundless dim optimism of hope.

I don't pretend to appraise the glamour of the East. To begin with, I don't know the most glamorous Orient lands, and, in any case, the cloak hung too loosely. I reached it at an age when the focus of impressionism has changed and when you cannot read easily into the external world the romance of your own cravings. But the East is still the East, multiple and tenacious. One stands bewildered before this pageant, which,

like an iceberg, has its chief being out of sight. And yet in perspective the very diversity of mankind is understandable through the study of a single human being. Who knows the East, its motives and its movements, but who knows his next-door neighbour? Such knowledge as we have possesses the doubtful value of empirical investigation and is rendered differently according to its interpreter. I confess that I can't render it at all in any concise form, though merely to say "The East," brings before me a whole series of unified impressions whose totality is wordless. In those Eastern realms of blazing sunlight, where the footing of the West is a mere imprint upon the sands of centuries, there is a haunting suggestion of black magic. It knits them together, the happy races and the sombre, in an obscure Oriental brotherhood whose roots are sunk in Stygian origins. The psychology of Asiatics may often approximate outwardly to our own, but there is something at the back which the arguments of democracy do not touch, or those abstract words that govern the conduct or express the desires of Occidentals. We come to them with our logical theories, and, behold, they have their own about which they do not argue. The

East is weary of the West, weary of its logic, weary of its tutelage. It has accepted from us a smattering of political idealism, but merely, so to speak, as a basis of argument. Easterns don't appreciate in the slightest many of our most cherished illusions, but we can only approach them through our own standards, and they can only obtain their wishes by pretending to aim at the goal of these standards. We talk to them of freedom, and they reply: "Well, give us freedom," but the only freedom they want is freedom from us. Words do not have a universally equal significance. What the Oriental really wants is a return to some sinuous Eastern mode of life where the order of things is fixed within and chaotic without.

Indeed, there is much at once incoherent and statuesque about the East. Like the jungle, it decays and grows in the intensity of a silent struggle. Deep down it has its own philosophy of quiescence, that bed-rock of the aged Oriental consciousness, but on the surface the muddle of its life is appalling. The generations may alter their external modes, even their external opinions, but the race-mentality remains steadfast. The further I left the East behind me, the more did

I conceive of it as a kind of abstraction. All you will ever notice is the sheath of its nerves, which conceals an idea more powerful, more universal, than any other idea in the whole world. But if I could explain what that idea is I should have ceased to be a European. For me to understand Asia would be a contradiction in terms.

I had plenty of leisure for my Eastern ruminations, sitting there amidst the cerulean calm of an unruffled Indian Ocean, and the conclusion I arrived at is that I can say nothing of value. I can give, as I hope I have given in this book, pictures of what I saw, thoughts about what I felt, but the secret of the East's cohesion eludes me. It eludes me in the very nature of things. In Africa, and even in South America, I had found the land itself the chief mystery, but in Asia, as in Europe, the people are the final problem. And the nurse is less enigmatic than her child, or, at any rate, her enigma is more of a piece. Many places take pride of beauty from those parts of Asia I saw, but beauty and glamour have no necessary connection, and I daresay the Eastern glamour has left its unrevealing stigmata upon me. Will it show later in the manner of invisible ink held before a fire ?

The ship was crowded. There were people from Siam, from the Straits and the F.M.S., from Burma, from Ceylon and Southern India, but the thoughts of one and all seemed centred upon Piccadilly or various race-courses. Their heads were turned towards home from the wild or fantastic places ; the East was to them no more than a means of livelihood. They reminded me of those curious animals who carry with them under water a bubble of air and dwell encased in one world in the midst of another. Europeans in their own way are as impervious as Asiatics. Therein lies our mingled success and failure with the Oriental. It is right that the overlord should be incomprehensible, but then he should comprehend. But, after all, it is good to think that the drawing East, in its glisten and its might, cannot outweigh the heritage of England. We send forth our sons and they return unchanged at heart. Their homeliness, their sense of humour, yes, even their insularity, remain unaltered before the opulent and tragic East. It may be a sign of unimaginativeness, it is certainly a sign of sanity.

The activities of board-ship life are not amusing, but the study of your fellow-passengers is. I don't mean it in a superior sense. No, it's just

amusing in the way that the unbiassed study of all life is amusing when you are able to get at grips with it. Men, being accommodating in the main, are easy to rub along with in the give and take of casual companionship, but with women it is less simple, because there is often a touch of dissimulation in their affability. I'm not talking about love affairs on board, which are no doubt very exciting under the passionate canopy of an unchanging South, in calm seas and starry nights, I don't aspire to such heights; I'm talking about the prosaic hours of a prosaic person, which, after all, can be quite rich in fancy, even on the obscure feminine. Still, of course, if we don't know very much about women, it's consoling to think that they don't know very much about themselves. A mystery that is a mystery right through is never so very daunting. That's one of those truths that aren't always obvious, just as it is not always obvious why explanations are worse than silence, or why it is seldom wise to bark unless you are prepared to bite, or why two friends in love with the same girl only feel jealous when they are apart, never when they are together, or why—which is really obscure and not at all trivial—potatoes taste so much better when

you eat them with your fingers. What frightens one in women is not their complexity, but the subconscious intensity of their sex. Taken in the widest meaning, a man's sense of sex sleeps at times, a woman's never. When she comes down to breakfast she is already a huntress, even when she doesn't know it. It is rather terrifying.

We crossed the Indian Ocean, killing time as best we could. When the day was over and the dancing to the gramophone was done, and the bridge-parties had broken up, and the last lady had floated away from some midnight conversation in the shadow of a boat, and the chunk of the propellers half drowned the breathing from a hundred cabins, I and a few others would emerge in our night attire and lean over the water and tell sad stories—well, not of the death of kings. The faint sway of the ship, the tepid breath of the sea, the silvery ripple on the horizon combined to give to the empty world an illusion of infinite peace. Fat men dozed uneasily on the hatchways, lying upon their backs in ungraceful attitudes, and the drone of hair-raising yarns in the group by the rails must have sounded in that rare solitude (provided you were some distance off) like the voice of poets invoking the image of the

horned and tender moon. These were the best moments of the voyage.

And then one evening in due time there showed up before us the twinkling lights of Suez. I do not know whether I have ever experienced a queerer emotion than I did on entering the Canal that night, with its contrast of petty trimness after the unmapped freedom of the sea. The ship gliding along the banks seemed somehow like a child's balloon floating over the desert. The silence was not the silence of the sea, it was the silence of sleep, and not that of the hushed winds in a vacuity where there is neither sleep nor waking.

A quick passage of twelve hours brought us to Port Said, and I landed the next morning, as I had landed there on my outward journey. And now, as then, I wandered off to that hotel by the ocean and sat down on its verandah. It was fitting that on this terrace, with Europe visibly at my side in the shape of the Mediterranean, I should end, as with a flourish of remembrance, this book of Oriental reminiscence. I put my elbows on the table and stared into the distance. And I beheld, beyond the solid figures of my companions, the fretted shores of tropic coasts, the

green forests, the glitter of a noonday sun, and I beheld other things, faces, faces, and I heard, as in a trance, the surf upon a palm-strewn beach and voices from over the sea's vast sunken rim. It was too much; I got up and walked away. The world is large, but it is smaller than man's imagination. To conquer it physically is a barren achievement unless we admit that the ultimate adventure of romance must tend inevitably to lessen in our minds, and not to increase, the importance of the world itself.

THE END

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